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Mentorability:
Understanding and Exploring First-Year Students' Perception of Engaging in a Mentoring Relationship at a Hispanic Serving Institution

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Mentorability:
Understanding and Exploring First-Year Students' Perception of Engaging in a Peer Mentoring Relationship at a Hispanic Serving Institution

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to those who have inspired me most. To my Mother and Tia Nelda, for your love and support throughout my life and for always encouraging me to follow my dreams. To Aaron, Sebastian, Oliver, and Caleb. Your profound patience, irrevocable love, and continued spirit has been the biggest blessing and influence of my life. Thank you!

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Mentorability:
Understanding and Exploring First-Year Students' Perception of Engaging in a Peer Mentoring Relationship at a Hispanic Serving Institution

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Higher education institutions have emphasized retention as one of the measurable outcomes linked with institutional performance, state and federal funding appropriations, and publicized rankings (Hagedorn, 2012). Therefore, higher education institutions intentionally have become more focused on providing a robust first-year college experience, including high-impact practices intended to help with adjustment, transition, and retention of students during their first year. One high-impact practice is a formal mentoring program focused on relationship building, positive peer support, and social guidance (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006). More specifically, peer mentoring is an important component of a student's first year and undergraduate experience (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Crisp et al., 2017; Gershenfeld, 2014; Jacobi, 1991; Miller, 2004).

Mentorability is a term that conceptualizes mentees' ability to engage in a mutually beneficial and developmental relationship (Reddick, 2014). It focuses on mentees understanding of their role and responsibilities engaging in the relationship. This study employed a phenomenological approach in examining how 17 mentees described their lived experiences of and how they perceived their ability to commit, contribute, and engage in a peer mentoring partnership in a formal mentoring program at an Hispanic Serving Institution.

The key findings of the study demonstrated: (1) mentorability as a process: from unclear expectations to viewing a mentor as a lifeline for success; (2) mentees as information seekers and mentors as influential contributors; and (3) communication and open-mindedness as key mentee contributions, trust as a gatekeeper for relationship formation, and mentorability as multi-level of exchange including understanding a mentee's role extends beyond the reciprocity with the mentor to other peers. Drawing from three social science theories, this study introduces a mentorability conceptual model for practice derived from findings from the study (Astin, 1993; Lin, 2001; Cropanzano et al., 2017). Additional findings, and implications for future research, practice, and theory are discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A student's transition to college can be a difficult and challenging experience encouraging higher education institutions to be innovative in finding ways to support student success. As students are transitioning to college, they are often simultaneously leaving their home, learning to navigate new technologies, building social networks, and adjusting to a different learning environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). College attrition is most likely to occur during or directly after a student's first year, which leads higher education institutions to emphasize the importance of retention after their first year as a success measurement (Tinto, 1993). Retention is one of the measurable outcomes linked with institutional performance, state and federal funding appropriations, and publicized rankings (Hagedorn, 2012). Therefore, institutions intentionally have become more focused on providing a robust first-year college experience, including high-impact practices intended to help with adjustment, transition, and retention of students during their first year. One high-impact practice is a formal mentoring program focused on relationship building, positive peer support, and social guidance (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006).

Mentoring as a high-impact practice does look different at many institutions, but the outcome of retention remains the same. Decades of research show the various functions of mentoring relationships and the positive direct and indirect outcomes of the mentorship (Astin, 1993; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salinitri, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Mentoring relationship functions include, but are not limited to, a successful transition to college, career focus, and graduate preparation (Huss, Randall, Patry, Davis, & Hansen, 2002; Salinitri, 2005; Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011). Empirical research also describes the various recruitment, training, and evaluation methods for the mentors (Collier, 2015). In addition, research also

strongly emphasizes the benefits of the mentoring partnership and the contribution to a student's well-being in a college environment (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salinitri, 2005). When it comes to mentoring, peers can be an influential contributors to the success of the partnership and the development of the student (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, & Pifer, 2017; Yomtov, Plunkett, Efrat, & Marin, 2017). Students are more likely to turn to a peer, someone close in age, than they are to an institutional faculty/staff member.

One area yet to be explored is how mentees view themselves in the partnership. Mentorability is a term that conceptualizes mentees' ability to engage in a mutually beneficial and developmental relationship (Reddick, 2014). In other words, mentorability is understanding how mentorable students are when and while engaging in the partnership. In this study, I sought to understand how mentees perceive their ability to commit, contribute, and engage in a peer mentoring partnership. I begin by providing a brief overview of the topic, time, and location of the study, identify theoretical frameworks, and outline key terminology commonly used throughout the study. I conclude the chapter with a roadmap of the study.

Mentorability

In contrast to mentors and the amount of time and support provided to them prior and during the engagement in the mentorship, mentee preparation and support are limited (Terrion, Philion, & Leonard, 2007; Terrion & Philion, 2008). Mentees often do not receive the vast and robust planning and direction needed for the partnership. Reddick (2014) first articulated the notion of "mentorability" and remarked the following:

> I want to introduce a term, and that term is Mentorability. What does it mean? Simply put, it is the ability to engage in mutually beneficial and rewarding developmental

> relationships. We often talk about teachable moments, or malleable mindsets, or even navigable career paths. Today, let's talk about what it takes to be "mentorable." (para. 6)

Reddick argues that a problem exists with the lack of focus on the mentees prior to the mentorship in assessing and understanding their own mentorability. This lack of focus on the mentees represents a considerable gap in the literature but also represents an opportunity to change how we prepare and support mentees as they engage in partnership and retention outcomes of mentoring programs. To assist in exploring mentorability, I examine the concept through a formal peer mentoring program within in a first-year experience at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). The sections below describe current literature contributing to the components that helped inform and frame the study.

Mentoring Programs

A recent synthesis of research literature on peer mentoring programs emphasizes the difference in role, functions, and program design at higher education institutions (Crisp et al., 2017). The addition of the synthesis to the literature has continued the decades-long debate on the disparity and different contexts the word mentoring can have on programs existing in the mentoring community at post-secondary institutions (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Gershenfeld, 2014; Jacobi, 1991). Mentoring can take the shape and form of many different relationships made palpable by institutional goals and objectives; however, with no unified description, mentoring can look and feel very different on college campuses. This lack of a unified description has complicated our understanding of mentoring practices, as the umbrella term can subsequently include many different variations of programs, outcomes, and terminology. In addition, mentoring is distinguishable from other support roles such as advisors, coaches, or sponsors in developmental relationships (Murphy & Kram, 2014). Despite the various program designs and

variations of the term, research has demonstrated the positive outcomes of mentoring programs (Astin, 1993; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salinitri, 2005; Tinto, 1993) and the benefits to individuals in the partnership (Holt & Fifer, 2016).

First-Year Experience

Institutions offering first-year experiences with high impact practices can contribute to a student's experience by centralizing services for students in transition and by highlighting high-impact practices such as academic support initiatives, academic advising, first-year seminar courses, and support networks (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2004). National organizations such as the National Resource Center (NRC), based out of the University of South Carolina, provide a hub for the First-Year Experience. The NRC is dedicated to supporting the needs of scholars and practitioners working with first-year students. The first-year experience movement nationally and internationally has contributed to many institutions collaborating and championing efforts to successfully transition and retain students after their first year. Mentoring programs intended to support first-year students, represents a high-impact practice contributing to a student's transition to college.

Hispanic Serving Institution

As the fastest growing ethnic population in the United States, Hispanics[1] are set to be a huge political and economic force to consider in understanding the future direction of our country (Benitez, 1998; de los Santos & Cuamea, 2010). The Hispanic population has continued to increase, including at post-secondary institutions (Benitez, 1998; Lucas, 2006), inevitably adding to the number of HSIs in the country (Excelencia in Education, n.d.). To better serve the

[1] For this study Hispanic, Latino, Latina and Latinx are used interchangeably. Hispanic terminology is specific to the language used and set by the Office of Budget and Management in 1977 (OMB, 1995). All other terms are self-identifiable by participants or myself.

increased numbers, HSIs were established to provide financial strength to those serving a larger population of Hispanic students. Hispanic Serving Institutions are defined as degree-granting, non-profit institutions that enroll at minimum 25% of full-time Hispanic undergraduate students (Santiago & Andrade, 2006). A definition established by the U.S. legislature during reauthorization of the 1992 Higher Education Act provides institutions classified as HSIs eligibility for financial awards intended to build the capacity to serve students. Hispanic Serving Institutions' funding may be used for services such as mentoring and is intended to increase degree completion among the student population. The challenges facing HSIs today, such as competing legislative financial interests, Hispanic enrolling vs. serving, are continuing to increase as scholars attempt to examine the impact of both academic and non-academic outcomes of the schools with this designation (Benitez, 2002; Garcia, 2016; 2017).

Problem Statement

Researchers in the last 30 years have consistently argued that no cohesive and consistent definition of mentoring exists and that the term is relative to those who engage in the partnership (Crisp et al., 2017; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). Extant research emphasizes the output of mentoring partnerships and the input in recruiting and training mentors, but little emphasis on preparing or understanding how mentees perceive their role in the relationship (Crisp et al., 2017; Gershenfeld, 2014; Miller, 2004). The lack of focus on the "mentorability" of the mentee represents a considerable gap in the literature. Therefore, the focus of this study is to examine the role and responsibilities of mentees at the beginning stages and throughout their first year of the partnership.

With the proliferation of HSIs and emerging HSIs in the country (Excelencia in Education, n.d.; Garcia, 2016), assessing and investigating peer mentoring relationships could

help such institutions improve the educational attainment of students attending an HSI (Garcia, 2017; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). With mentoring demonstrating itself as an effective practice for increasing belonging and retention among the Latinx population (Moschetti, Plunkett, Efrat, & Yomtov, 2018; Rios-Ellis, Rascon, Galvaz, Influenza-Franco, Bellamy, & Torrez, 2015), the study may contribute to how an HSI provides intentional services, thereby adding to the "servingness" movement (Garcia, 2016). Scholars and critics have argued that being an HSI really means being a Hispanic *enrolling* institution instead of a Hispanic *serving* institution (Calderón Galdeano, Flores, & Moder, 2012; Garcia, 2016). The servingness vs. enrolling debate has placed urgency and an emphasis on examining programs at HSIs and how they are serving students.

Scope of the Problem

There are many different roles and functions of mentoring partnerships (Crisp et al., 2017). Formal and informal programs exist with the goal of connecting a mentor and mentee to a fruitful and developmental relationship. As stated above, as part of the preparation to enter into a developmental relationship, mentoring programs emphasize mentor training that prepares them for how to mentor (Terrion et al., 2007; Terrion & Philion, 2009). However, mentees do not receive the same information or level of training about the purpose of mentoring and of what it means to engage as a mentee. The most relational research on the topic is Henry, Bruland, and Sano-Franchini's (2011) which found that students' predisposition to mentoring may influence the outcomes of mentoring programs. Research is limited on how mentees' roles or responsibilities address how mentees' predispositions are altered because of participation in a mentoring program or how these predispositions are measured or evaluated. In addition, successful mentoring experiences describe the relationship as mutually reciprocal and

meaningful. One study found that a "degree of maturity" should be required for a reciprocal relationship for both mentor and mentee but highly emphasized that mentees benefited the most when mentors demonstrated maturity (Healy & Welchert, 1990). Without mentee training or preparation, most mentees enter into the relationship blindly and are unaware of their own developmental growth opportunities and of any reciprocity they bring to the partnership.

Today, there is little research that involves exploring how mentees and their mentorability – which can be a combination of their experiences, skills, and commitments which they bring to the mentorship – can influence the partnership. What are the expectations on the commitment of the partnership? What does it mean to be mentorable? How do mentees understand their role in the partnership? Formal mentoring programs spend a substantial amount of time and money in recruiting, screening, training, and evaluating the mentors. I argue that there is a significant gap in the literature on doing the same for the mentees. What are practitioners and programs doing ahead of time to prepare the mentees for the partnership? Closing the gap can help scholars and practitioners further develop and enhance mentoring relationships at the local, state, and national level by refocusing their efforts on the mentee at the onset of the partnership. Currently, assessment tools like the College Student Mentoring Scale (CSMS) have been developed to help enhance mentoring programs or to assess the program's effectiveness (Crisp, 2009). At the moment, no mentee scale currently exists that contributes to helping or facilitating the mentor and mentee on the mentees' "mentorability" prior to the relationship. However, before a scale can be created, examining, and gathering information on how mentees view themselves in the partnership are critical first steps. The intent of this study is to add to the limited body of literature on "mentorability."

Methodology

In this study I employ a phenomenological approach and consider the lived experiences of a sample of 17 first-year students at Texas State University. Texas State University is an HSI located in the southwest part of the country. The phenomenon under study is the experience of how mentees understand and engage in the mentoring partnership at the beginning and how they experience their role in participating in the relationship through their first year. To help capture a mentee's perception and description of how they understand their role in the partnership, I use three different methods to obtain the data: (a) initial demographic survey; (b) semi-structured interviews; and (c) focus groups with a card sorting activity.

The overall method began with the initial recruiting and screening of participants, followed by a semi-structured interview as part of a two-part interview process during a student's first year. Participants were first invited to participate in an individual interview during the beginning of the spring 2020 semester. Students had an option to participate in a second individual interview or focus group six weeks after the first interview. Initially, data collection intended the second interview to be conducted via a focus group. The focus group allowed students to build upon their own experiences and those shared by others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to COVID-19 and the impact it had on participants, I made accommodations to meet with students on their own schedule to complete the second interview. During the second interview, mentees participated in a card sorting activity to help determine what the most and least important characteristics were needed for a successful mentoring relationship (Spradley, 1979).

After completing the individual interviews and focus group, I used both a deductive and inductive approach at coding transcripts from the audio recorded interviews (Miles, Huberman &

Saldana, 2014). I used open and axial coding simultaneously to analyze the data and identify shared meanings and themes among the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). To help frame the study, I initially identified several overarching codes during the process of developing a conceptual map and determining the research questions. The initial codes were applied to the transcripts after the first and second round of coding. I then used inductive coding to add sub-codes after the individual interviews and the second round of coding based on students' responses. This approach helped explore and conceptualize codes within the social exchange theory (SET) and social capital framework. Subsequently, I identified common themes through my data analysis on how mentees assess their own mentorability. The themes describe the most salient roles and responsibilities of mentees and how they found meaning in the partnership.

Theoretical Frameworks

To frame this study, I drew from other disciplines within the social sciences to help describe the phenomenon at study. I used three theoretical frameworks: Astin's (1993) I-E-O model, social exchange theory (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, & Hall, 2017), and social capital (Lin, 2001) (Figure 2.1). Astin's (1993) Input – Environment – Output model was used as a theoretical framework to capture a specific point in a student's mentoring partnership by focusing on the beginning of the Environment stage in the early development of the partnership. More specifically, I was interested in learning more about a student's initial reaction of how they perceived participating in a formal mentoring partnership and how their engagement developed.

Secondly, social capital is the "investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace" (Lin, 2001, p. 19). The individual's ability to access human capital is based on the social capital within the individual (Coleman, 1988). Most mentoring programs are developed with the intentional understanding that an exchange will occur as part of the partnership,

leveraging how the mentor's human capital is transferred to the mentee. The framework helped guide the interview protocol and how and when mentors and mentees' exchange of information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement occur in the partnership.

In addition, social exchange theory (SET), first introduced in the late 1950s, examines how exchange, reciprocity, and influence, impacts partnerships, groups, and organizations (Homans, 1958). The framework Cropanzano et al. (2017) developed builds upon Cook & Emerson's (1978) and Homans' (1958) SET framework and includes (a) an actor's initial treatment towards a target individual; (b) a target's reciprocal response (both attitudinal and behavioral) to the action; and (c) relationship formation. SET suggests that the relationship is both interdependent and contingent on the actions of another individual (Blau, 1964). Using the SET framework, I examined mentees' engagement in the partnership by identifying ways certain characteristics define one's ability to be mentorable. The SET framework also lends itself to identifying mentee characteristics that are both attitudinal and behavioral contributions to the partnership.

Finally, to help learn more about their interpretation of mentorability and help provide a more robust response to question three (discussed below), mentees selected characteristics as part of a card sorting activity. The card sorting activity was used during the second interview to help mentees conceptualize mentorability even further. Taylor and Black (2018) examine mentoring program websites and identify the most common pre-dispositions institutions listed on their websites that mentees needed to have prior to engaging in the partnership. The top pre-dispositions listed include: (a) professional, (b) communicative, (c) open-minded, (d) committed, (e) responsible, (f) initiative, (g) active, (h) realistic, (i) understanding, (j) available, and (k) willing (p. 302). Comparing how mentoring programs describe mentoring in their websites to

how mentees perceive their own pre-dispositions will help in identifying congruence between programs and mentees' own perceptions.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how mentees perceive their ability to engage in a peer mentoring partnership at the early onset and during the relationship in a student's first year in a formal mentoring program at a large HSI in the American Southwest, Texas State University. The institution was selected due to the robust first-year experience program, an established and certified mentoring program, and my direct involvement with the program and access to research participants. Utilizing Astin's (1993) I-E-O model, Lin's (2001) social capital and Cropanzano et al.'s (2017) SET frameworks, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do student mentees describe their expectations at the beginning of the formal peer mentoring partnership?

Research Question 2: How do student mentees describe their lived experiences in the formal peer mentoring partnership?

Research Question 3: How do student mentees describe the reciprocity and what they bring to the formal peer mentoring partnership?

The study's intent is to advocate for evidence-based practices designed to add training, awareness, and an initial development of a relationship with the mentor for the partnership. By understanding how best to communicate with mentees, this study adds to the robust mentoring literature and advocates for including the voice of the mentees at every stage of the relationship but, more importantly, at the onset and beginning stages of the partnership. When providing a mentee perspective and assessing their own mentorability, mentoring programs can better

prepare, train, and educate the mentees prior to engaging in the partnership. There is plenty of research examining the outcomes of the partnership for both the mentor and mentee, but the scope of this study is to understand a mentee's perception of their own mentorability at the onset of engaging and during the relationship with a peer mentor. The relevance of this study is echoed in Crisp et al. (2017) as worth exploring and developing in the most recent synthesis of mentoring program literature.

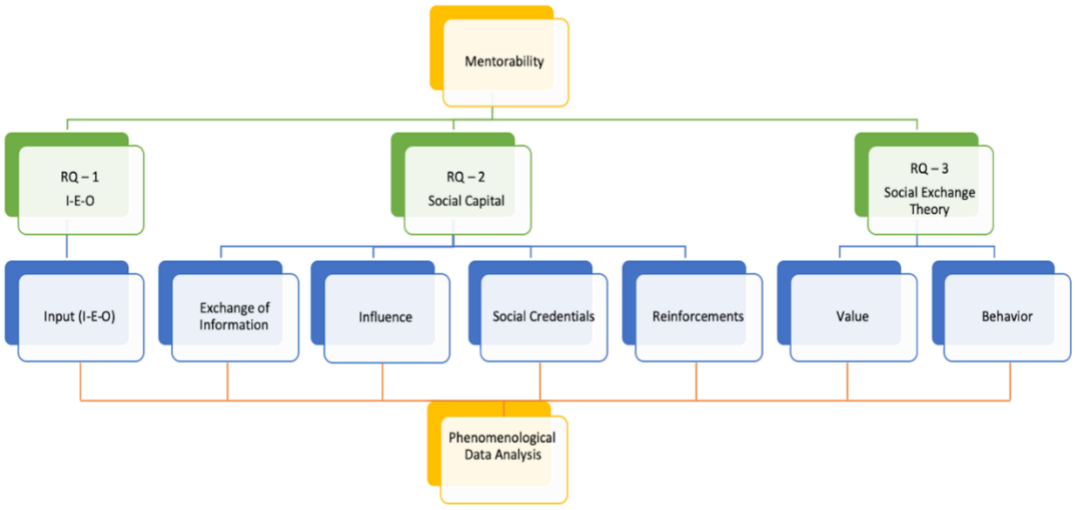

Figure 1.1. Research Questions and Applied Theoretical Frameworks

Positionality

As director of a the peer mentoring program, I was fortunate to create, develop, and grow the PACE Peer Mentor program (discussed more in Chapter Three). Understanding the Peer Mentor operations and the role and responsibilities of the mentor, I became keenly interested in exploring the nuances of a mentoring partnership and why mentoring partnerships fail and succeed. This interest allowed me to have first-hand knowledge of identifying areas of growth and improvement and fueled the curiosity that led me to refocus efforts on mentees throughout their experience in the program.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with any research study there exists limitations and delimitations to the study. For researchers, it is important to acknowledge and assist in mitigating these challenges. Limitations are beyond the control of the researcher while delimitations are decisions that are within the scope of the researcher but may also impact findings of the study. Two limitations arose as part of the study. First, due to COVID – 19, initial data collection was interrupted, and six participants did not participate in the second interview. I sought guidance and advice from my co-chairs and the IRB office. Additional modifications were made on the second interview to accommodate participants' availability and technology concerns. This accommodation included changing the research design from focus groups to a combination of focus groups and interviews. The second limitation was using snowball sampling while recruiting participants. With direct contact to other support service colleagues, several student recommendations were provided to me by US 1100 faculty members and academic advisors. These participants were actively engaged in class or advising sessions and might have had pre-dispositions to actively participate in college experiences, including as a research participant.

Two delimitations arose as part of this research study. The first delimitation is that the research site is a single-site institution in the American Southwest. Employing a single-site study, focused on one population of the study and a small sample size may impact the generalizability of the findings to other mentees, mentoring programs, or larger audiences. The intent of the study was to expand on a phenomenon and inform future research on the topic. The second delimitation was participants previously engaged in a formal mentoring partnership were not eligible to participate, as a major focus of the study was having participants who had no

previous experience in a partnership. Limitations and delimitations, in addition to methods for reducing them will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Significance of Study

Building on mentorability as a concept and examining first-year students as mentees in a formal mentoring program at an HSI, this study seeks to understand and explore mentorability by providing conceptual depth towards a student's ability to commit, contribute, and engage in a mentoring partnership. The goal of strengthening mentoring pairings exists but is nonetheless limited; assessing one's mentorability is meant to provide utility to the mentoring partnership and help institutions transition first-year students successfully.

With the bulk of the literature (Crisp et al., 2017) focusing on the roles (Colvin & Ashman 2010; Hall, Draper, Smith, & Bullough, 2008), functions (Bonin, 2013; Huss et al., 2002; Salinitri, 2005; Schreiner et al., 2011), and designs (Apprey, Preston-Grimes, Bassett, Lewis, & Rideau 2014; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, & Collins, 2006; Kostovich & Thurn, 2013) in participating in a mentoring partnership and the output of measurable outcomes and benefits of the partnership, the need for this study highlights the ways mentees identify and place value and depth into assessing their own mentorability prior to or during the first stages of the partnership for both scholars and practitioners. The following relevant discussion points are intended to increase awareness and an understanding of mentorability.

The current mentoring literature fails to identify frameworks meant to provide an understanding of how one can value one's commitment and behaviors when participating in the partnership. Both SET and social capital theory can lead to the development of mentee materials including how we interact and communicate with mentees particularly during the onset of the

partnership. In addition, such frameworks can help develop assessments focused on individual mentorability and assist in the practice of assessing mentorability in an attempt to strengthen the partnerships.

Finally, even a bit of exposure to the word mentorability can bring awareness and can build on mentoring literature related to one's own mentorability. A simple Google search of "mentorability" yields very little response. Providing avenues that support discussion ,such as scholarly articles, conferences, and mentoring and mentee training programs, can help better prepare our own developmental journeys and inform mentoring programs on the importance of mentorability. Mentorability is not a new concept, yet the specific term has helped place higher emphasis and refocus efforts on the mentee and the label of mentorability. Research and practice have continued to stress the importance of the mentoring impact, with recent scholarly work beginning to understand the need to address mentees' mentorability and the gap in research and practice (Crisp et al., 2017).

Definition of Key Terms

To provide context and clarification, the section below includes definitions and terminology used throughout this dissertation on commonly used terms in this study.

First-Year Experience

Intentional academic and cocurricular efforts (high-impact practices) used to strengthen the quality of student learning during a student's first year in college (Upcraft et al., 2004).

First-Year Experience Programs

First-year experience programs that deliver comprehensive high-impact services to help with a student's academic and social adjustment and transition to college life (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

Formal Mentoring Program

A formal mentoring program is defined as the partnering of an experienced mentor with a less knowledgeable and novice mentee within an organizational structure and often is usually shorter in duration, lasting a specific time frame (six months to a year; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Hispanic

The terminology is specific to the language used and set by the Office of Budget and Management in 1977 (OMB, 1995).

Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)

A degree-granting, non-profit institution that enrolls at minimum 25% of full-time Hispanic undergraduate students (Santiago & Andrade, 2006).

Mentee

A younger protégé willing to learn from his/her mentors' present and past actions (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Mentorability

A willingness to engage in a mutually beneficial and developmental relationship (Black & Taylor, 2018; Reddick, 2014; Taylor & Black, 2018).

Mentoring Relationship

This is a relationship with a more advanced and knowledgeable student mentor where mentees are intended to improve their professional, career, and personal networks through the shared experiences of the partnership (Scandura & Williams, 2004).

Mentor, or Peer Mentor

A "guide who helps freshmen navigate through academic, social, and personal difficulties" *(*Bonin, 2013, p. 1).

Retention

A term that "refers to the rate at which an institution retains and graduates students who first enter the institution as a freshman at a given point in time" (Tinto, 2012, p. 137).

Social Exchange Theory

A two-sided mutually contingent and mutually rewarding process also referred to as "transactions" (Blau, 1964).

Social Capital

An "investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace" (Lin, 2001, p. 19).

Organization of Study

This dissertation includes six chapters, including references and appendix. The first chapter includes an overview of the study and an introduction to the literature and methodology. Chapter 1 also identifies a gap in the literature and provides an argument for the significance of the study. The chapter concludes with key terminology used throughout the dissertation.

Chapter 2 provides the scholarly and relevant historical context to provide a foundational support and to address the need for the study. Also included is an in-depth explanation of theoretical frameworks that are included to examine mentees' mentorability.

Chapter 3 includes detailed information on the methodological procedures used in conducting the study. Information on the research site, participants, and coding strategy is discussed in detail. Finally, limitations, delimitations are discussed.

Chapter 4 provides descriptive information about each research participant including their definition of mentoring, a description of their relationship with their mentor, and their understanding of mentorability.

Chapter 5 identifies key findings from the study, including rich descriptions that answer the three research questions.

Chapter 6 describes implications of the study and future suggestions for research and practice.

Conclusion

To frame this inquiry, I provide a current synthesis of mentoring literature and highlight an essential area to explore mentorability further (Reddick, 2014), focused and situated within students' first-year experience at an HSI. Secondly, I propose three frameworks, Astin's (1993), I-E-O model, social capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Lin, 2001), and social exchange theory (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Homans, 1958) to ground an in-depth exploration of mentorability. The relevance of this study contributes to the conversation on the impacts of retention and other high impact practices and is echoed in several recent publications as worth exploring and developing in mentoring scholarship (Black & Taylor, 2018; Crisp et al., 2017; Taylor & Black, 2018). The following chapter provides an overview of mentoring literature and reviews key areas pertaining to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The definition and history of the word mentoring has origins to Homer's *Odyssey* in ancient Greek literaturey. An important character in the Odyssey story, the female Goddess Athena, is linked to the roots and beginnings of mentoring. She disguised herself as Mentor, a man, meant to provide wisdom and rearing to Telemachus, Odysseus's son. Mentor was tasked in and entrusted to a mentoring role with Telemachus during the 10-year Trojan War while Odysseus lead the Greeks into battle. The symbolic nature of the mentoring relationship has transcended time, gender, and culture (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Today mentoring and its roots are still alive and thriving in almost every industry. In higher education, mentoring partnerships have existed almost as long as higher education itself and are intended to paint a picture of a successful, more advanced individual providing wisdom, guidance, and support to a protégé throughout a mutually developmental journey (Lucas, 2006). At any point in our individual lives, mentoring relationships can help shape our trajectory and learning experiences. The enduring experience is most beneficial during a transitional period, particularly during an individual's transition to post-secondary education.

A student's transition to college can be a difficult and challenging experience, one encouraging higher education institutions to be innovative in finding ways to support students (Bowman, Miller, Woosley, Maxwell, & Kolze, 2018). Students often simultaneously leave home, learn to navigate new technologies, social networks, and adjust to unique learning environments, including a variety of different levels of academic expectations (Mayhew, Rockenback, Bowman, Seifert, Wolniak, & Pascarella, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). College attrition is most likely to occur during or directly after a student's first year, which leads higher education institutions to place emphasize on retention after their first year as a success

measurement (Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 1993, 2006). Retention is one of the measurable academic outcomes linked with institutional performance, state and federal funding appropriations, and publicized rankings (Hagedorn, 2012); therefore, institutions have become more focused on intentionally providing a robust first-year college experience, including high-impact practices and success initiatives intended to help with first-year students' adjustment, transition, and retention (Kilgo et al., 2015; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). These high-impact practices are intended to mitigate and impact a student's environment in order to decrease attrition and influence a student's ability to integrate into the campus community (Kuh et al., 2008). One high-impact practice is including a formal mentoring program with an emphasis on relationship building, positive peer support, and social guidance (see for example, Crisp et al., 2017; DeMarinis, Beaulieu, Cull, & Abd-El-Aziz, 2017; Kilgo et al., 2015).

One area yet to be explored is how mentees view themselves in the partnership. Mentorability is a term that conceptualizes mentees' ability to engage in a mutually beneficial and developmental relationship (Reddick, 2014). In other words, mentorability is understanding how mentorable students are when they first engage with a mentor and throughout the process of the partnership. In contrast to mentors and the amount of time and support provided to them prior to and during the engagement in the mentorship, mentees often do not receive the vast amount of training and preparation needed as they engage and begin their mentoring partnership (Terrion et al., 2007; Terrion & Philion, 2008). Reddick (2014) first articulated the notion of "mentorability" as the "ability to engage in mutually beneficial and rewarding developmental relationships. We often talk about teachable moments, or malleable mindsets, or even navigable career paths. Today, let's talk about what it means to be mentorable" (para. 6). In this study I explore this

problem, notably the lack of focus on the mentees prior to the mentorship in assessing and helping them understand their own mentorability.

Building on mentorability as a concept and examining first-year students as mentees in a formal mentoring program at a HSI, I in this chapter assess and identify the need for mentorability and explore how a student describes their ability to commit to, contribute to, and engage in a mentoring partnership. I argue for the need for mentorability by synthesizing undergraduate mentoring literature to understand and provide a critical analysis of the literature focused on mentee preparation and applicable theoretical frameworks to view mentorability and how it impacts first-year students at an HSI. Before addressing the nuances and benefits of mentorability, the literature review is meant to breakdown mentoring program literature, situate the important need of mentoring in first-year experiences and at an HSI, define the roles of mentor and mentee, identify the benefits and challenges of mentoring partnerships, and highlight the areas of the potential growth of mentorability in the mentoring literature.

By defining and understanding how best to address mentees at the onset of the partnership and address their mentorability, my study's results may add to the robust mentoring literature and advocate for the voice of the mentees at every stage of the relationship. Through identifying mentees' perspectives and having mentees assess their own mentorability, mentoring program staff can better prepare, train, and educate their mentees prior to engaging in the partnership.

Mentoring Literature

A recent monograph of research literature on undergraduate peer mentoring programs emphasizes the variation at higher education institutions and the differences in roles, functions, and program designs (Crisp et. al., 2017). The recent monograph addition to the literature

extends and continues the decades-long discussion on the different ways the word mentoring is practiced in mentoring programs (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Gershenfeld, 2014; Jacobi, 1991). Mentoring can take the shape and form of many different relationships and are made palpable by institutional goals and objectives. With no unified description and commonality, mentoring can exist and feel very different at many institutions. This array of differences has troubled mentoring research and practices as the umbrella term of mentoring can subsequently include many different variations in program designs, training, and outcomes. It has also allowed the saturation of the word to seep into similar professional roles within higher education, such as coaching, advising, and teaching (Murphy & Kram, 2014). The literature on mentoring demonstrates the vast importance and impact that mentoring can have on the individuals and their developmental journey. In addition, acknowledging the importance of mentoring has also impacted the advancement of a mentoring program's objectives and societal impact.

Mentorability

Mentorability is a relatively new concept in the literature, yet it is practiced every day. We spend our days in developmental relationships, whether they are professional, spiritual, or personal. We are continuously learning and growing from others. The historical perception that mentoring partnerships are one-directional, and that the development of the mentee is the only measurable outcome, has been replaced with a strong emphasis on the partnership being mutually beneficial (Holt & Fifer, 2016). Mentors have understood the need to develop and build trust early on to establish and cultivate the relationship, especially when challenges at the beginning of a partnership emerge. Relationship-building is particularly important when establishing trust, a lack of which can diminish a partnership by not allowing it to start. Mentees bring a wealth of experiences, including relational experiences, to the partnership. These pre-

conceived experiences can make participation in a mentoring relationship challenging and can lead to inactive and unengaged partnerships. Facets of their mentee's mentorability may help better shape how they begin their mentoring journey; therefore, examining how mentees understand their mentorability may transform how they approach mentoring and impact the relationship.

Mentoring Programs

The last three decades of recent research illustrate an overview of direct outcomes of mentoring relationships and the variation of mentoring programs (e.g., Astin, 1993; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salinitri, 2005; Tinto, 1993). The saturation of the term "mentoring" encompasses many different roles, functions, and purposes in entrusting a more experienced individual to advance the knowledge, skills, and abilities of a younger, less experienced protégé. The volume of literature in higher education speaks to the multitude of mentoring work and encompasses a wide variety of roles within the umbrella term of mentoring (Crisp et al., 2017; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). Mentoring program functions include but are not limited to a successful transition to college, career focus, academic interventions, and graduate preparation (Bonin, 2013; Huss et al., 2002; Salinitri, 2005; Schreiner et al., 2011). The literature also describes the various recruitment, training, and evaluation methods for mentors participating in the partnership (Collier, 2015; Packard, 2003). In addition, the research strongly emphasizes the benefits of the mentoring partnership and the contribution to a student's well-being in a college environment (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salinitri, 2005).

Recently, mentoring research has significantly increased, demonstrating the benefits for the mentee and mentor in participating in formal mentoring programs at a higher education institution (Crisp et al., 2017). Crisp et al. (2017) identified a large array of different forms of

undergraduate mentoring programs as described in their monograph examining over 100 mentoring articles between 2008 and 2015. The synthesis is organized by conceptual, theoretical, and methodological practices and argues that mentoring programs lack theory in organizing mentoring practices. Subsequently, the word mentoring is loosely defined and can vary depending on program design and function, thus demonstrating the versatility of the term (Crisp, 2009; Crisp et al., 2017; Nora & Crisp, 2007). For instance, in the partnership, mentors can be peer-to-peer, near-peer, faculty, staff, community member, or alumni (Crisp et al., 2017; Price & Balogh, 2001; Yomtov, et al., 2017; Zell, 2010). The diverse array of individuals who serve as a mentor highlights the invested interest in the development of others and the multitude of individuals who can step into the role.

When it comes to program design, mentoring can be one-on-one, group-mentoring, cluster-mentoring, and can be defined by the duration of the relationship (Apprey et al., 2014; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Eby et al., 2006; Kostovich & Thurn, 2013). Program designs are impacted and can vary by institutional investment in mentoring partnerships, such as financial and individual resources that often aid in the development and sustainability of programs. Institutions can have as little as one full-time employee (FTE) responsible for mentoring institutions or an entire staff (student and/or professional) dedicated to mentoring initiatives. Mentoring partnerships also include a mix of participation efforts (Edgecomb, Crowe, Rice, Morris, Wolffe, & McConnaughay, 2010) and often are focused on providing academic intentionality (Bonin, 2013). These functions are linked to institutional objectives and can be measured by academic outcomes such as mentees' academic achievement, retention efforts, and degree completion (Astin, 1993; Bowman et al., 2018; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Parise & Forret, 2008; Salinitri, 2005; Tinto, 1993). The research on mentors, as discussed in detail later,

also includes information about the recruitment, training, preparation, and evaluation of mentors (Collier, 2015; Packard, 2003), a key contribution in the earlier advancement in mentoring work. Mentoring programs are multifaceted and vary by institution and intended outcomes. Yet the literature is limited in discussing mentees' contributions in shaping their approach and commitment to the partnership.

Types of Mentoring Relationships

The term relationship can be applied to various forms of organic interactions, including romantic, friendship, professional, spiritual, and familial. Preparing for any type of relationship can be beneficial in understanding how to engage and actively participate in the experience. There are self-help books and research focusing on how to navigate and participate in various types of relationships, but limited information addresses the role and reciprocity of a mentee in mentoring, specifically of undergraduate college students.

Developmental relationships are an important part of individual life and of a career journey. "Developmental relationships" is an overarching phrase used to capture roles that influence a mentee's growth and development and may include but is not limited to a student mentor (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Other developmental relationships in a student's first year may include an academic advisor, academic coach, career counselor, faculty member, or resident assistant. A student's developmental network is important to a successful first year; however, it is important to note the distinction of the role of a mentor and the differences a sponsor, coach, and mentor may have in a student's journey (Chao, 1998; Higgens & Kram, 2001; Murphy & Kram, 2014). Mentoring may contribute to other developmental relationships; however, a mentor is not a full-time advisor, an academic coach, or career sponsor.

A formal mentoring program is defined as the partnering of an experienced mentor with a less knowledgeable and novice mentee within an organizational structure and often is usually shorter in duration, lasting a specific time frame (six months to a year; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). The intent of the pairings is often linked to measurable outcomes and goals designed by the program and impacted by the partnership (Parise & Forret, 2008). The formal mentoring relationship, as a high-impact practice, is intended to contribute to the overall first-year transition of new students to the campus culture (Kuh et al., 2008). Formal mentoring relationships are considered highly valuable to an institution that views mentoring as a considerable investment, both financially and from a capital perspective, in a student's first year of college. Opposite of formal mentoring partnerships are organic or informal relationships that develop without the consultation or development of a mentoring program. It can be difficult to capture informal mentoring and its mentor/mentee experiences and measure the overall impact of the relationship; therefore, they are beyond the scope of this study. In this study, I focus on studying formal relationships with the intention of capturing participants already engaged in the mentoring partnership in order to gain a better understanding of their perceptions and lived experiences.

First-Year Experience

To help shape and narrow the scope of the study, a first-year experience provides a scope large enough to identify literature and includes a highly visible transitional period during a student's educational journey. Higher education institutions are likely to offer first-year experience programs delivering comprehensive high-impact services to help with a student's academic and social adjustment and transition to college life (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). First-year experience programs vary by institutional type and culture and may include services such as academic advising, first-year seminar courses, learning communities, academic support

initiatives, on-campus residential living, mentoring programs, and support networks for specific populations (Upcraft et al., 2005). The shift in focus to first-year students occurred during the 1980s when institutions began looking specifically at the first year in a student's transition to college and the social and academic impacts a new environment has on a student's ability to be successful (Barefoot, 2000). Students making the transition to college encounter many challenges and obstacles during their critical first year, and institutions have developed first-year programs to provide a supportive and robust environment to combat concerns and encourage a healthy transition to the university community.

Institutions offering first-year experiences programs contribute to a student's development by centralizing services for students in transition and highlighting high-impact practices such as academic advising, first-year seminar courses, mentoring programs, academic support initiatives, and support networks (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Upcraft et al., 2004). Research suggests that when it comes to retention, engagement matters most, especially during a student's first year (Astin, 1993; Bowman et al., 2018). The importance of engagement has been a desirable shift from previous thought when only student characteristics were considered a strong indicator of student success (Tinto, 2001, 2006: Upcraft et al., 2005). The engagement shift provided choice and opportunity for institutions to create strong and intentional programs and services to help students' transition. National organizations, such as the National Resource Center based out of the University of South Carolina, provide a hub for the first-year experience and are dedicated to supporting the needs of scholars and practitioners working with this population of students. The National Resource Center, home to the first-year experience and transition services, includes publications, specialized institutes promoting support for specialized populations, several national conferences, and online resources that link research and practice.

The core values of the center include commitments to students' transitions, connection between research and practice, inclusion, collaboration, and lifelong learning (National Resource Center, n.d.).

The first-year experience movement nationally and internationally has contributed to many institutions collaborating and championing efforts to successfully transition and retain first-year students. First-year experience programs support a learning environment in the classroom by offering first-year seminar courses designed specifically towards transitioning and teaching learning frameworks for college students. Ninety percent of four-year institutions in the United States offer some sort of required or optional first-year experience course (National Resource Center, n.d.). In addition to in-class educational opportunities, institutions also foster the out-of-classroom experiences and the social support networks that are created through mentoring and co-curricular activities. When it comes to mentoring in college, students' peers can be an influential contributor to the success of the partnership and the development of the student (Crisp et al., 2017; Moschetti et al., 2018; Yomtov et al., 2017). Therefore, peer mentoring during a student's first year may demonstrate an intentional success strategy supporting a student's ability to succeed, transition, and be retained at a higher education institution.

Peer Mentors

Mentees are more likely to listen to someone close in age, regardless of years of experience or expertise of subject matter (Angelique, Kyle, & Taylor, 2002). Mentors, especially peer mentors, are an important contributor to a student's first-year transition to a college environment (Crisp et al., 2017; Tarrion & Leonard, 2007; Yomtov et al., 2017). Mentors are intended to provide a similar-in-age support network, provide guidance, model good academic

behavior, and help students successfully transition to a college setting (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Saltintiri, 2005). By having a relationship with a more advanced and knowledgeable student mentor, mentees are intended to improve their professional, career, and personal networks through the shared experiences of the partnership (Scandura & Williams, 2004). With these positive outcomes, mentors become an instrumental partner in a student's academic journey.

Mentors benefit from training, preparation, and evaluation of their role prior to and while engaging in the partnership (Terrion et al., 2007; Terrion & Philion, 2008). Assessment tools like the College Student Mentoring Scale (CSMS) have been developed to help in the creation of mentoring programs and to assess the mentoring program's effectiveness (Crisp, 2009). Used at multiple institutional programs, the CSMS focuses on outcomes of the partnership and measures the impact for both the mentor and mentee. Developed by Gloria Crisp, the CSMS can be purchased and used for program evaluation and has established validity and the scale constructs within the assessment (Crisp, 2009). In addition, mentoring practices and programs have emphasized the importance of mentor training.

The College Reading Learning Association (CRLA), International Mentoring Training Program Certification (IMTPC), which provides a training framework that includes 35 hours of specific and evidence-based topics to train mentors prior to engaging in the partnership (CRLA, n.d.). The rigorous training certifies mentoring programs across the country, provides training guidelines for mentoring best practices, and establishes credibility within the program. Subsequently, many handbooks and guides have been developed to provide step-by-step instructions on mentoring best practices (Collier, 2015; Miller, 2004; Ragins & Kram, 2007). In addition, Terrion and Leonard (2007) developed a taxonomy on characteristics suitable for peer

mentors in support roles based on reviewing 54 scholarly articles. The taxonomy included two career-related characteristics and eight psychosocial functions. The 10 characteristics are (a) program of study, (b) self-enhancement motivation, (c) communication skills, (d) supportiveness, (e) trustworthiness, (f) interdependent attitude to mentoring, mentee, and program staff, (g) empathy, (h) personality match with mentee, (i) enthusiasm, and (j) flexibility. The taxonomy can be a helpful tool yet should not be exclusive of mentoring partnerships or exhaustive in the specific role of the mentor. While the purpose for the study is not to examine how peer mentors in the relationship engage in the mentorship partnership, I do acknowledge peer mentors as important actors in a mentorship. However, peer mentors are instrumental in the experience of mentees and how their mentorability helps them define their role in the partnership and can shape their experience at an HSI.

Mentees

At the forefront of every mentoring partnership is the development and advancement of the mentee. After all, at the end of the day, it is the mentee's journey that mentoring partnerships are attempting to shape, grow, and develop. Participating in a mentoring relationship in a college or university setting is linked with the mentees' individual decision when agreeing to the partnership (Baker & Griffin, 2010). The understanding of the commitment to the relationship is an instrumental factor in the success of the partnership and the continued advancement of the mentee. The intended outcomes for advancing the mentees' academic or social transition to a college campus, career, or community are perceived differently by both mentor and mentee, varying by the differences in the roles, designs, and function of the mentoring program. For instance, a recent study by Yomtov et al. (2017) found that peer mentoring helped students feel more connected, supported, and active on campus, adding to the emotional support contributions

of a peer as a form of social capital (discussed later). In addition, mentors receive substantial training on how to mentor; however, mentees do not receive the same information on what it means to be mentored. Therefore Reddick's (2014) concept of mentorability can therefore make a considerable contribution to the mentee's training and preparation and early assessment of a mentee's ability to be mentorable.

Despite the proliferation of mentoring research, closely related research on the topic of mentees and their mentorability is Henry, Bruland, and Sano-Franchini's (2011) study that found that students' predispositions to mentoring may influence the outcomes of mentoring partnerships. The study surveyed 404 students participating in a writing seminar course with an embedded peer mentor. Using Nora and Crisp's (2009) mentoring framework: (a) psycho-social support, (b) career path, (c) academic subject knowledge, (d) role modeling, the study found an additional fifth latent construct that focuses on mentees' willingness to commit to the partnership (Henry, Bruland, & Sano-Franchini, 2011). Yet subsequent research has failed to address how mentees' predispositions are impacted, measured, or evaluated because of their participation in a mentoring program. In addition, Searby (2014) developed a dichotomous mentoring mindset framework conceived through the mentors' perceptions and includes binary competency pairs: (a) initiative, (b) learning orientation, (c) goal orientation, (d) relational skills, and (e) reflectiveness. The dichotomous scale is intended to score mentees on their competency pair; however, the framework lacks a major contributor to the development and function of the assessment—the mentee. The mentoring mindset framework focuses on the mentor's description of the mentee's characteristics in engaging in the partnership and not on the mentee's own examination of the partnership. However, much like Searby's attempt to provide a framework for mentees, mentees themselves may not be aware or lack the understanding they too can contribute

to the success of the mentoring relationship and do more than attend a meeting or listen to the advice provided by their mentor.

To have a successful mentoring experience, each mentoring relationship must be mutually reciprocal and meaningful (Holt & Fifer, 2016). Mentoring relationships are created with the intent of developing a mentee's skills, talent, and knowledge. The important practice of discussing the mentee's engagement in the partnership and reciprocity in the relationship is not a current practice in how formal mentoring programs solicit mentees (Black & Taylor, 2018). In other words, no one is talking to mentees in a way that benefits their interest and involvement in the partnership and that assesses their ownership in defining mentorability and which is the focus of this study.

Mentoring Benefits: Outcomes for Both Mentor, Mentee, and Mentoring Programs

In its true form, mentoring partnerships are meant to be mutually beneficial in developing both participating individuals. The results of successful mentoring programs support the notion that both the mentor and mentee receive benefits from participating in the partnership (Holt & Fifer, 2016). Benefits for participating in a formal mentoring relationship at a higher education institution may include social and academic integration, academic achievement, retention, and degree completion (Astin, 1993; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salinitri, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Other studies have included the specific benefits for the mentor participating in the partnership relative to academic, emotional, and non-cognitive factors (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Haber-Curran, Everman, & Martinez, 2017; Harmon, 2006).

On a larger scale, mentoring initiatives have been developed at a national level (e.g., My Brother's Keeper, Big Brothers/Big Sisters), local level (e.g., UT's Project MALES, Collegiate G-Force, and a variety of community-based mentoring programs), and have impacted the lives of

many individuals and helped further advance research and practice. Currently, several national conferences such as The Mentoring Institute based out of the University of New Mexico gather scholars and practitioners once a year to discuss current practices and up and coming trends revolving around mentoring (UNM, 2020). The University of New Mexico's Mentoring Institute also publishes a monthly newsletter and is home to the *Chronicle of Mentoring Journal*. In Texas specifically, during national mentoring month, The University of Texas at San Antonio hosts the Texas Mentoring Summit, a regional conference focused on multilevel mentoring programs at the community, K-12 schools, and higher education level.

Mentee benefits also include the cultural capital gained from a mentoring partnership. Focusing on Latino mentor strengths, such as being a first-generation college student, can impact mentees' academic development (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). This is a continued area of scholarly pursuit, and practitioners are examining high-impact practices such as mentoring, especially for first-year experience programs and specific populations. By enhancing high-impact practices, institutions are placing awareness of the variety of academic and non-academic outcomes perceived by individuals, both as mentors and mentees within formal programs in a college environment. Outcomes for mentees as discussed in the literature have traditionally been an important measurement in how mentees participate in the partnership and in the success of the programs.

Mentoring Challenges

Mentoring partnerships are often characterized by many challenges during the duration of the experience. Universally, mentoring scholars have argued that no clear or singular definition of what mentoring is exists, which can lead to misconceptions for both mentor and mentee (Crisp et al., 2017; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). The lack of a cohesive mentoring definition in

the literature can be frustrating, with many scholars attempting to define and create a variety of frameworks, and conceptualize what mentoring is and should be (D'Abate, 2009; Dawson, 2014; Healy & Welchert 1990; Searby, 2014). These discussions lead researchers and scholars, including myself, to ask the following questions: (a) How much of mentoring partnerships fail because programs do not adequately prepare mentees for the partnership? (b) How does the lack of no single definition of mentoring partnerships confuse and divide mentees' perspectives of what mentoring relationships are intended to do? Scholars attempts to answer these and similar questions results is exposing important gaps and areas to explore and assess within the mentoring literature.

Mentoring partnerships may fail for a variety of reasons including opposing interests, poor communication, or unclear expectations of the partnership (Hansman, 2003; Straus, Johnson, Marquez, & Feldman, 2013), and the body of literature includes multiple methods of measuring the various types of mentoring program successes (Allen, Eby, O'Brien, & Lentz, 2008). In addition, scholars have included a lack of empirical research contributing to a significant challenge in the purpose and function within the mentoring community (Bonin, 2013; Gershenfeld, 2014). With no clear road map of how mentoring should work, scholars and practitioners craft together programs and services based on best practices instead of bridging empirical research to practice.

In addition, having no consistent and cohesive definition of what a mentoring relationship entails often leads mentees into a blind partnership (Gershenfeld, 2014; Miller, 2004). Failing to prepare mentees for maximizing the mentoring experience can also lead to mentees entering the relationship blindly. Looking specifically at Texas's 44, 4-year public institutions, once can see that there are currently 176 websites that list a mentoring program; however, only 19% list

information on the concept of "mentorability" (Black & Taylor, 2018). The research also supports these findings as demonstrated by a study by Hall et al. (2008), who found self-efficacy difficult to maintain when roles and responsibilities were unclear. Clarification and an understanding of their role can be a contributing factor in understanding how mentorable mentees are. There is a significant window of potential opportunity in simply addressing "mentorability," a concept and practice that is not being considered in formal mentoring programs.

Formal and informal programs exist with the goal of connecting a mentor and mentee in a fruitful and developmental relationship. As part of the preparation, most mentoring programs focus on mentor training, preparing them on how to step into the role of a mentor (Collier, 2015; CRLA, n.d.; Packard, 2003); however, mentees do not receive the same information or level of training on what it means to engage as a mentee. As previously mentioned, the most related work on the topic is Henry, Bruland, and Sano-Franchini's (2011), which found that students' predisposition to mentoring may influence the outcomes of mentoring programs, especially when mentees demonstrated "willingness and initiative" (p. 9). The researchers discussed predispositions that enhance mentoring relationships but did not specifically talk about training preparation. Research is limited on how mentees' preparation for their roles or responsibilities impact their participation in a mentoring program or how individual predispositions in engaging in mentorship are measured or evaluated.

Assessment tools like the (CSMS) can help in enhancing mentoring programs and in assessing the program's effectiveness (Crisp, 2009). Yet, currently, no mentee scale exists that contributes to helping or facilitating the mentor and mentee on the mentees' "mentorability" prior to the relationship. To assist with the development of a mentee scale, a foundational study

that explores how mentees and their mentorability – which can be a combination of their prior or current experiences, abilities, and commitment they bring to the mentorship – can influence the partnership is needed. Further, questions regarding this understudied concept are beginning to be introduced in the literature and are worth exploring. Some key questions that have led to important conversations include the following: What are the expectations on the commitment of the partnership? What does it mean to be mentorable? How do mentees understand their role in the partnership? Formal mentoring programs spend a substantial amount of time in recruiting, screening, training, and evaluating mentors (Crisp, 2009), and I argue there is a significant gap in the literature about what practitioners are doing ahead of time to prepare mentees for the partnership.

Finally, there is also an emphasis on output/outcomes of mentoring partnerships and on input in recruiting and training mentors, yet little emphasis on preparing or understanding a mentee's role in the relationship early exists. The lack of focus on the "mentorability" of the mentee is a considerable area to explore and can advance mentoring literature and practice (Black & Taylor, 2018; Reddick, 2014; Taylor & Black, 2018). Furthermore, Crisp et al. (2017) argued that there is an absence of theory and practice in how mentoring programs develop and enhance their mentoring partnerships. To address this gap, I draw from other fields of study to analyze and conceptualize the next direction of mentoring work.

Theoretical Frameworks

Mentorability is not a new concept, yet the specific term has helped to place higher emphasis and refocus efforts on the mentee and label of mentorability (Black & Taylor, 2018; Reddick, 2014; Taylor & Black, 2018). Reddick (2014) articulated that mentoring programs must place a greater emphasis on the mentee, specifically focusing on the mentee's "ability to

engage in mutually beneficial and rewarding developmental relationships" (p. 1). The understanding and education could inform the mentee to begin to cultivate their own mentorability or "what it takes to be mentored" (para. 1) and enhance the preparation and expectations at the beginning of a developmental journey. To frame this study, I draw from other social science disciplines to help describe the phenomenon. I used three theoretical frameworks: Astin's (1993) I-E-O model, social exchange theory (Cropanzano et al., 2017), and social capital (Lin, 2001; Figure 2.2). My study uses Astin's (1993) Input - Environment – Output model was used to identify a specific point in a student's mentoring partnership by focusing on their preconceived perceptions (*Input* stage) and the early development of the partnership (*Environment* stage). Social exchange theory (SET), first introduced in the late 1950s, examines how exchange, reciprocity, and influence impacts partnerships, groups, and organizations (Homans, 1958). Cropanzano et al.'s (2017) SET framework builds upon Cook and Emerson (1978) and Homans' (1958) SET framework and includes (a) an actor's initial treatment towards a target individual (b) a target's reciprocal response (both attitudinal and behavior) to the action, and (c) relationship formation.

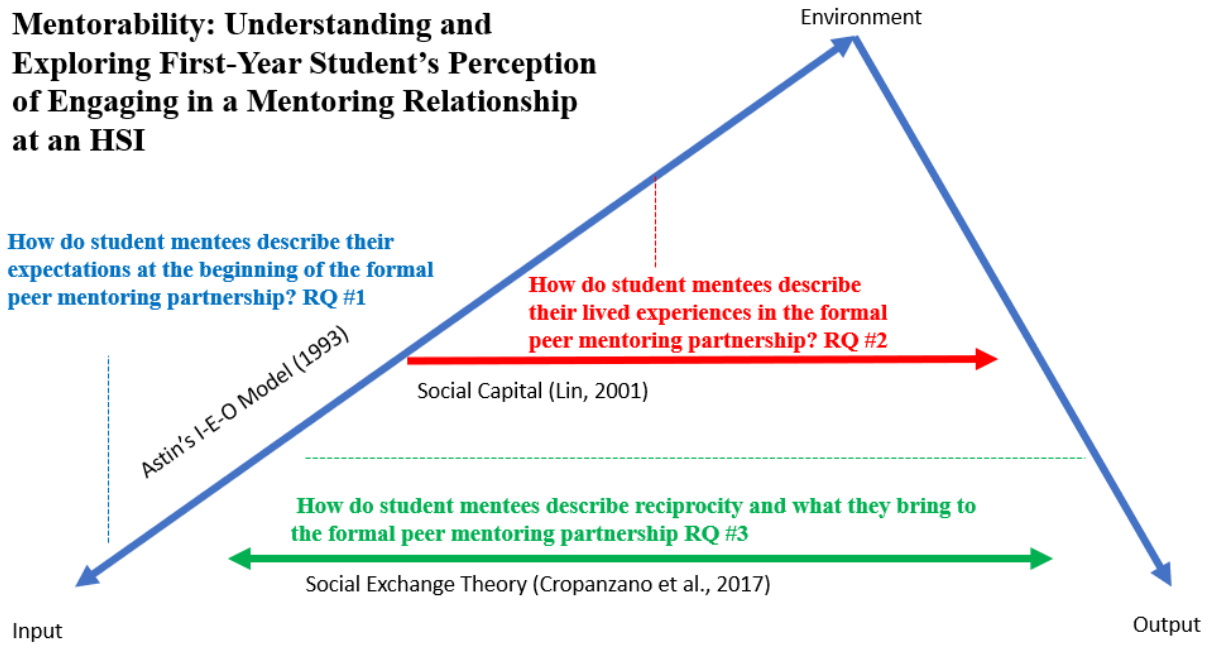

Figure 2.1. Visual of Applied Theoretical Frameworks with Research Questions

Astin's I-E-O Model

While both research and practice have continued to place emphasis on the impact of mentoring (Crisp et al., 2017), a suitable direction for the field would be to reimagine Crisp's (2009) College Student Mentoring Scale (CSMS) and Higher Education Research Institutes, Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRPs) The Freshman Survey to assess a student's mentorability through Astin's (1993) Input section of the I-E-O Model. Astin's model includes assessing a student's characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors upon entering college (*Input*), during the duration of their college (*Experience)*, and upon exiting the campus community (*Output*). The simple model is meant to emphasize and provide attention to manipulating the environment students participate in order to hopefully impact the output of retention, and other academic outcomes, as opposed to selecting and educating based on student characteristics at the input stage of the model (Krause & Coates, 2008; Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 2001).

Changes in the environment stage, such as high-impact practices and strategic initiatives are meant to stimulate growth and provide supportive strategies in developing the student. To maximize the environment, identifying student pre-dispositions at the input stage may impact the partnership while in the college environment. For instance, Taylor and Black (2018) examined mentoring program's websites and identified the most common mentee pre-dispositions that institutions listed as important qualities that mentees needed to have prior to and while engaging in the partnership. The top pre-dispositions listed include professional, communicative, open-minded, committed, responsible, initiative, active, realistic, understanding, available, and willing (p. 302). These pre-dispositions provide insight into how mentoring partnerships communicate to the reader and are intended to provide congruence between programs and mentees' own perceptions prior to engaging in the partnership. The online mechanism to communicate is one venue to inform and educate mentees on their own mentorability.

The overall goal of strengthening mentoring pairings exists, and assessing mentorability is meant to make the mentoring partnership thrive and maximize engagement. By understanding mentees' perceptions of their own role and preparing them for the relationship, mentoring partnerships can develop and unearth a vital factor in the next direction of literature and practice for mentoring partnerships. Mentees' development is a measurable outcome of the partnership, so why then are scholars and practitioners not preparing them for the developmental and transformational partnership prior to the relationship starting?

Astin's I-E-O model (1993) provides a framework that allows mentoring to be situated as an important high impact practice at both the environment and output stages, but it does not provide a potential framework to assess mentorability at the input stage. The next step is to explore theories from other disciplines that might help researchers explore the phenomena of

mentorability. Drawing from two additional theoretical frameworks, social exchange theory (SET) and social capital theory, I provide theoretical frameworks to address Research Questions 2 & 3 in ways mentee's mentorability at the environment stage of the partnership can lead to mentee preparation and assessing one's ability to engage in the partnership, successful pairings, and enhance mentorship benefits and outcomes.

Social Capital Theory

Capital has its origins from economist/sociologist Karl Marx (1849), who first developed capital theory through the economic exchange and commodity of goods. Capital is the notion of exchange value between production and consumption and the laborers and capitalists. Other scholars have continued using the notion of capital to continue building on the exchange and production in a variety of forms and disciplines, such as social work and interdisciplinary fields. Schultz (1961) continued to expand the theory to include a stronger emphasis on human capital and the additional value embedded within individuals themselves. Capital is not always seen as the physical exchange of labor, but as the skills, education, and knowledge individuals possessed within the action of their work. Many scholars have different approaches to defining social capital, including viewing social capital as being a form of neo-capitalism (Bourdieu 1977; Coleman, 1988; Flap, 1991; Lin, 2001).

Other scholars have argued that earlier models of social capital are framed through a deficit perspective instead of an asset or strength-based perspective (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Yosso, 2005). Moll et al. (1992), discuss the importance of connecting "funds of knowledge" from their past and home environment and the importance of those assets to shape their connection to social networks and environments. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model focuses on cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities students of color bring with

them to the classroom. Both arguments bring awareness to how students' experiences prior to engaging in the partnership shape how they perceive mentoring relationships and how they connect with their peer mentor through the process.

For this study, social capital is the "investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace" (Lin, 2001, p. 19) and is visualized by Lin's Modeling Conditions for Social Capital Development (p. 246) (Figure 2.3). Most mentoring programs are developed with the intent that exchange will occur as part of the mentoring partnership, often leveraging the mentors as human capital through the transfer or a transaction of an exchange to the mentee. The framework helps identify how and what are mentees' preconceived perceptions, and exchanges that impacts their willingness to engage in the partnership or their mentorability to receive the various forms of human capital.

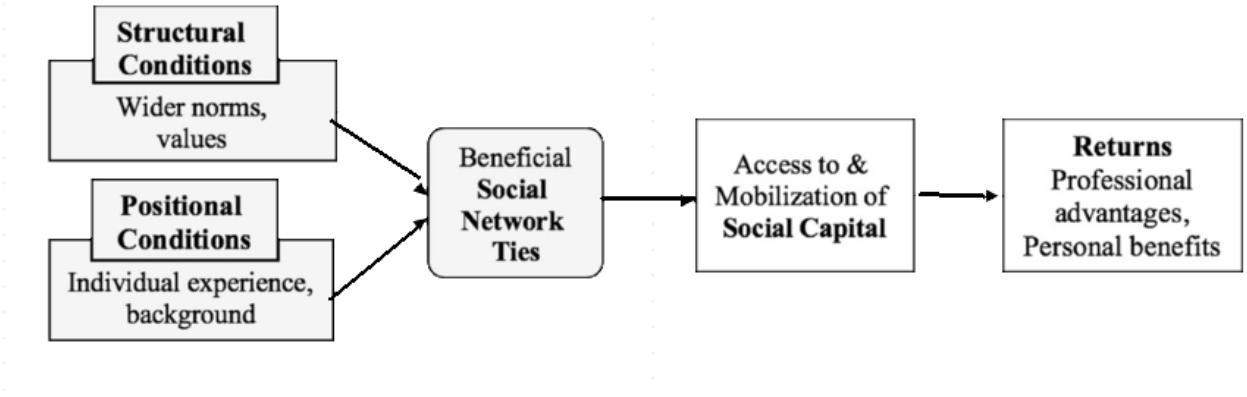

Figure 2.2. Modeling Conditions for Social Capital Development (Benbow & Lee, 2019)

The individual's ability to access human capital is based on the social capital within the individual (Coleman, 1988). In mentoring partnerships, this is seen as the purpose and function of transferring these invisible possessions from mentor to mentee throughout the engagement. Lin (2001) describes four elements: information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement. The exchange and partnership of mentoring programs are influenced and strengthened by Lin's

description of social capital and differentiates it from other models focused on personal, economic, and human capital.

Social capital in the mentoring partnership is an exchange of social networks and not material resources. Mentoring programs have an exchange of information (more knowledgeable and experienced peers with campus resources), influence in the power dynamic (how a mentor can be instrumental in connecting a mentee to resources), the social credentials needed to navigate a college environment, and the reinforcement needed to sustain a partnership (the relationship building and trust between both parties), the reinforcement (the continued interaction and mutual commitment to the partnership). Students participating in a formal mentoring program structurally contribute to a relationship grounded in trust, authority, and commitment. The exchange of the partnership stresses trust, norms, sanctions, authority, and closure as forms of social capital. For instance, Moschetti et al. (2018) found that Hispanic first-generation students' social capital was an important element in the navigation of the university environment and something they benefited from their peer mentor. Social credentials in building their social networks and reinforcement in being a positive peer educator to students are important. Therefore, much like Coleman (1988; 1990) sees social capital as a public good, mentoring programs are beneficial to the development of the mentee.

It is important to note potential pitfalls and areas of weakness within the social capital framework. Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (1977) conceptualizes the theory using symbols and meanings through reciprocity, trust, and communication as important elements in a socially constructed world. The sociological lens influences the relationship building and places emphasis on the reciprocity brought from and inevitably capitalized in the partnership. One of Bourdieu's weaknesses is echoed by Lin (2001) in that "pedagogic processes by which the dominant culture

and values are accepted and taken in as one's own without any resistance or even conscious awareness on one's part" (p. 15). The social reproduction of Bourdieu's theory places emphasis on the dominant class values, including the knowledge exchange, thus perpetuating the dominant class and exists as a source of symbolic violence (Lin, 2001). Individuals may dismiss the cultural capital they inherently possess and consider the dominant class as an important element in societal capital, often not seeing their own experiences as contributions to shape their relationship. The social capital lens through which mentorability can be seen does have potential drawbacks and limitations as mentioned before; however, the dissemination of social capital may strengthen a mentee's willingness to grow and find value in the partnership.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (SET), first introduced in the late 1950s, examines how exchange, reciprocity, and influence impact partnerships, groups, and organizations (Homans, 1958). Social exchange theory can be linked to a variety of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, and management (Fiske, 1991; Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1967). SET assumes that relationships can be established, sustained, and dissolved if the perceptions and costs of the relationship do not outweigh the benefits and rules/norms that exist as part of the exchange process (Ensher & Murphy, 2011). Mentees must find value and understand the purpose of engaging in a mentoring partnership early in the relationship. Social behavior is defined as the "exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as symbols of approval or prestige" (Homans, 1958, p. 606). The most compelling concept, Homans argued, was that the process of equilibrium, which includes the influence in creating a balance in the exchanges, inevitably impacts the relationship (Homans, 1958). In addition, exchanges were not exclusive to

material goods but also included symbolic values that may contribute to the behavior in engaging in the mentoring partnership.

Homans' (1961) original SET theory discussed five basic propositions about human behavior: success, stimulus, deprivation-satiation, value, and rationality propositions. Since then, SET has further developed and been an instrumental framework in how relationships develop and thrive. Blau (1964) took this a step further and highlighted that "social exchange as conceived is limited to actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others" (p. 6). This finding suggests that SET is a two-sided mutually contingent and mutually rewarding process also referred to as "transactions" (Blau, 1964). This framework helps ground the notion that mentoring partnerships are a two-directional relationship, enabling transactions as able to acquire an important symbolic value. Mentees may understand that they too contribute to the partnership and that the reciprocity they bring shapes their mentors and their own experiences.

In addition, rules/norms exist as part of the exchange process. These guided rules include reciprocity and negotiation (Cook & Emerson, 1978; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gouldner 1960; Molm, Takahashi, & Peterson, 2000). Molm et al. (2000) found that trust and commitment were stronger predictors in a reciprocal exchange than in a negotiated exchange. In addition, trust is strongly emphasized by Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), focusing on an interpersonal referent, team referent, and organization referent as theoretical actors in enabling and linking positive outcomes within the organization. Establishing trust and rapport early in the interactions may further advance mentees' commitment to the partnership, but the following questions remain: Do mentees see the value in demonstrating these characteristics, and does their behavior represent the reciprocity in the mentorship?

Cropanzano et al.'s (2017) framework builds upon Homans (1961) and Cook and Emerson's (1978) SET framework and includes (a) an actor's initial treatment towards a target individual, (b) a target's reciprocal response (both attitudinal and behaviorally) to the action, and (c) a relationship formation. Using the SET framework, mentees' engagement in the partnership may explore and identify ways certain characteristics define one's ability to be mentorable. The framework lends itself to identifying mentee characteristics that are both attitudinal and behavioral contributions to the partnership. Finally, awareness of one's pre-set characteristics may help mentees conceptualize their own mentorability even further. For instance, Taylor and Black (2018) examined mentoring programs' websites and identified the most common pre-dispositions institutions listed on websites that mentees needed to have prior to engaging in the partnership. Comparing how mentoring programs describe mentee characteristics on their websites can help develop mentees' own understanding and awareness of pre-dispositions that will help in identifying congruency between programs and mentees' own perceptions.

Two Dimensions of Social Exchange

Emerson (1976) argued SET is not a theory but a conceptual frame of reference. Resources only flow between individuals when reinforcement is the contingent factor valued by both parties (p. 359). The framework is enduring and often used to examine organizations, concepts, and outcomes but lacks a clear construct definition, hedonically positive and exclusive, and is too general and imprecise (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Therefore, to recognize the need to refocus efforts on mentees at the onset of the partnership, the two dimensions of the SET theory framework developed by Cropanzano et al., (2017) address the deficiencies of previous models of SET and is being used to conceptualize mentorability for this study (Figure 2.4).

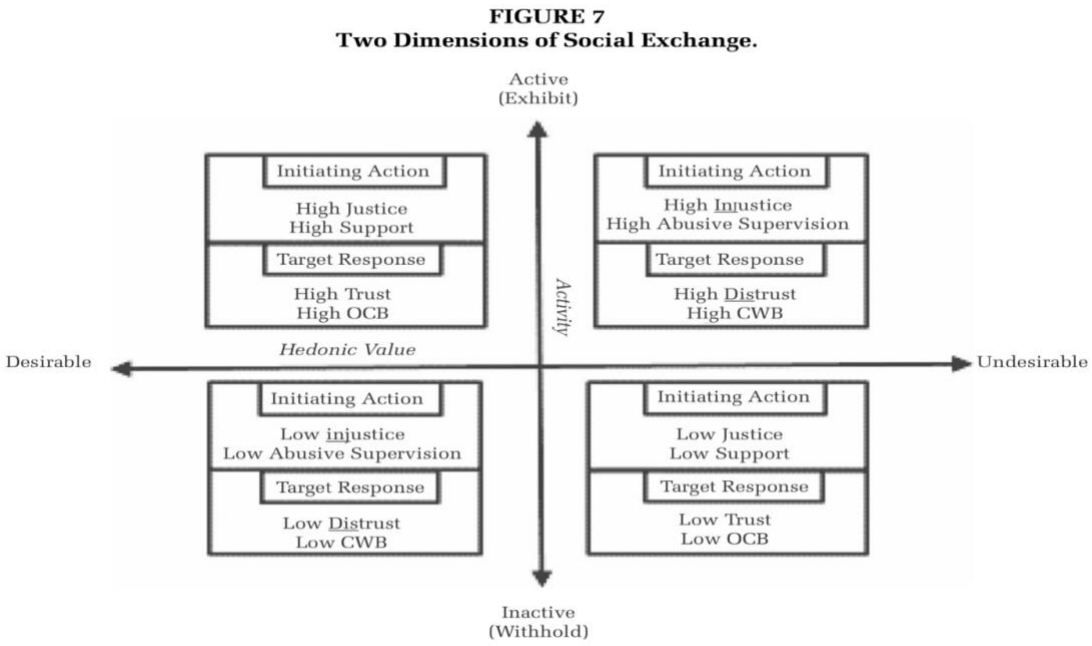

Figure 2.3. Two Dimensions of Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano et al., 2017)

Examining mentees as they walk through the experience of a mentoring partnership through the lens of SET may help in developing the need to 1) communicate expectations earlier, 2) establish reciprocity and mentees' role in the partnership, and 3) determine mentees' commitment to the relationship. The more hedonic value and active behaviors they describe, the more involved mentees may be in the partnership contributing to their own mentorability. This more active involvement may not only help scholars narrow their scope in how examining mentees early in a mentoring partnership, but it can also enhance mentoring programs by helping them understand how to prepare mentees and assess their mentorability ahead and during the partnership. The less value and engagement mentees perceive the partnership engagement to be, the less chance they are in being mentorable. While some students' mentorability can be categorized differently in the model, the SET framework helps identify areas where a student can build upon to grow in their ability to be more mentorable in the partnership. Mentorability, as in

any relationship, is fluid. The mentorability continuum is constantly evolving and is being shaped by the multiple transactions they receive in the partnership.

Conclusion

As Maya Angelou once said, "We often delight in the beauty of a butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty." When we think and talk about mentoring, we often end with a painted picture of mentees developed and poised for the next stage of their career or journey. Mentorability is not a new concept, yet the specific term has helped place higher emphasis and refocus efforts on the mentees and label of mentorability. Research and practice have continued to stress the importance of the mentoring impact with recent scholarly work beginning to understand the need to address mentees' mentorability and the gap in research and practice (Black & Taylor, 2017; Crisp et al., 2017; Reddick, 2014; Taylor & Black, 2018). Mentoring partnerships are developmental journeys; however, much like a vacation, education, or a new career journey, some type of planning and preparation for the adventure is needed.

The intent of this chapter was to summarize current mentoring literature and highlight the limited body of literature on "mentorability" and discuss frameworks guiding this study. The need to develop the awareness and shift focus and help mentees develop ownership in the partnership is critical to mentoring work. There is a substantial gap scholars and practitioners are missing that can help mentoring relationships at the local, state, and national level by refocusing their efforts on the mentee at the onset of the partnership. The overall goal of strengthening mentoring pairings exists but is limited; assessing mentorability is meant to make the mentoring partnership thrive and help institutions transition first-year students successfully.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Currently, there is limited research exploring how mentees and their mentorability – including a combination of their experiences, skills, and commitment as they engage in the mentorship – can impact the partnership. Formal mentoring programs spend a lot of time in recruiting, screening, training, and evaluating the mentors, yet there is a substantial disconnect in the literature about what programs and individuals are doing ahead of time to prepare the mentees for the partnership and for understanding their experiences at the beginning of the partnership. This chapter outlines the research design for the study.

Purpose of the Study

Mentoring programs are continuously valued in and out of the academia. Institutions have placed value on the important impact mentorship can have on academic and non-academic outcomes, focusing on every transition during a student's college experience, from their first year to beyond commencement. In this study I seek to understand how mentees perceive their ability to engage in a mentoring partnership at the early onset of the relationship during a student's first year in a formal mentoring program at a large HSI in the American Southwest. Participants were first-year students at Texas State University's, Personalized Academic and Career Exploration (PACE) program. Students are assigned a peer mentor based on enrollment in University Seminar, a required first-year seminar course taken during their first semester. Peer mentors are paired to the University Seminar section during the summer preceding the fall semester when students enroll at the university. Students therefore are blindly matched with a peer mentor when they enroll in the course and not matched in traditional pairings (i.e., major, hometown, similar interests). Lastly, this study applies Astin's (1993) I-E-O model as a framework to identify a specific point in a student's mentoring partnership, and both social

capital (Lin, 2001) and SET theory (Cropanzano et al., 2017) to guide the study and conceptually understand how mentees perceive their role and experience.

Research Questions

Mentoring partnerships support the notion that both the mentor and mentee receive benefits from participating in the partnership (Holt & Fifer, 2016). This overall benefit includes academic outcomes such as social and academic integration, academic achievement, retention, and degree completion (Astin, 1993; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salinitri, 2005; Tinto, 1993) as well as non-academic outcomes such as emotional and psychological support (Harmon, 2006; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Haber-Curran et al., 2017). Astin's (1993) I-E-O model of helps by identifying a specific moment in time to understand how mentees perceive their role at the early onset of the relationship. Early examination of the mentee's perception at the beginning of the environment stage of the partnership is critical to beginning to understand their lived experiences and their role as a mentee entering a formal partnership. In addition, mentoring programs are developed with the objective that an exchange will occur as part of the partnership, often leveraging the mentors as human capital through transferring an exchange to the mentees (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Lin, 2001). These frameworks help identify how and what are mentees' preconceived perceptions are as well as the exchange that impacts their willingness to engage in the partnership or their mentorability in order to exchange the various forms of human capital.

As a result of identifying a need to examine mentees' mentorability and utilizing Astin's (1993) I-E-O model, Lin's (2001) social capital and Cropanzano et al., (2017) SET frameworks, three key research questions sought to answer the following research questions.

Research Question 1: How do student mentees describe their expectations at the beginning of the formal peer mentoring partnership?

Research Question 2: How do student mentees describe their lived experiences in the formal peer mentoring partnership?

Research Question 3: How do student mentees describe the reciprocity and what they bring to the formal peer mentoring partnership?

As previously stated, the intent of this study is to advocate for evidence-based practices designed to add awareness, training, and initial development of the mentee prior to the partnership. By understanding how best to communicate to and prepare mentees, this study contributes to the robust mentoring literature and advocates for the voice of the mentees at every stage of the relationship, but most importantly at the onset of the partnership.

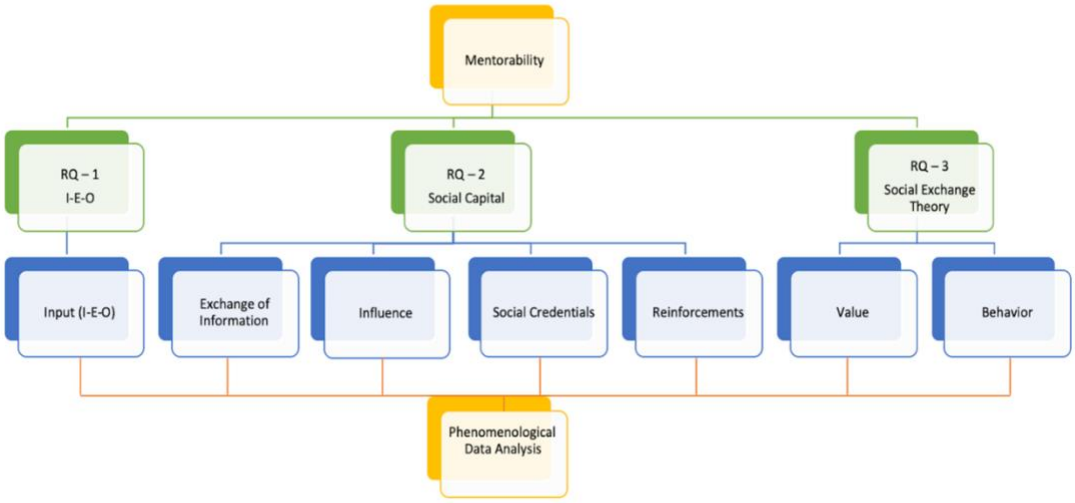

Figure 3.1. Research Questions and Applied Theoretical Frameworks

Research Design

Within the constructivist epistemology this study uses a phenomenological approach in understanding how mentees perceive their ability to be mentored through their own lived experiences (Crotty, 1998). Phenomenology study states "…that there is an essence or essences to shared experience. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced" (Patton, 2015, p. 116). This study identified what experiences mentees shared and how they made meaning to their role while engaging in the partnership. In addition, phenomenology is used to "determine effort to undo the effect of habitual patterns of thought and to return to the pristine innocence of first seeing" (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 680). The research design describes the process for developing the study, recruitment of participants, description of data collection, a methodology rationale, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and ethical and quality considerations.

Constructivism

From an epistemological standpoint, this study uses a constructivism paradigm. In other words, how we perceive the world and create meaning comes from our "existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8) and our previous experiences (Lin, 1998). Therefore, meaning could not exist unless we have social contact with others and the world around us. A mentoring relationship only works when it is grounded in social contact and interaction with others. It is not objective, as in a black and white post-positivism realm, but may be more subjective, where if meaning and understanding are to occur, it is to be studied and practiced by the construction of the partnership and commitment. In a mentoring context, a constructivism paradigm is viewed when an organic or formal partnership occurs between two individuals. This study helped me to understand the meaning of the partnership and provide

meaning as to why the engagement works or why it does not. Initial questions from my work in the field led to a curiosity to understanding the stages of a mentoring relationship. Specific questions arose such as the following: How does it begin? What makes the partnership fruitful? What congruent synergies exist in creating a partnership? Furthermore, constructivism can be viewed throughout as an "inherit…system of significant symbol" (Crotty, 1998 p. 54). Our history, culture, and interactions with others help construct our meaning in the world. Constructivism acknowledges our previous experiences and how we use them in interacting and understanding new situations and the world (Lin, 1998). Therefore, each mentee enters the partnership with historical assets and innate contributions available when engaging with their mentor. Understanding mentorability cannot be quantified or captured through a survey or questionnaire right now, ones often used for matching mentor to mentee, so this study is first meant to understand themes relevant for future research development on the topic. First, scholars must use a qualitative approach to grounding the theoretical underpinnings of how mentees make meaning of their role to comprehensively capture their stories. The purpose of this study is to help set a framework for future work in developing any typologies and best practices in and for mentee preparation.

One of the strengths of a constructivist epistemological stance is how meaning is constructed by societal interactions and human behavior. Thus, "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). By referring to simple interactions, we as researchers and practitioners make assumptions as to how we engage with our students and develop policies and best practices in our work. Working with mentoring, when using a

constructivist paradigm, we can interpret why mentees respond to mentors or how mentorability impacts the commitment to the partnership. There is no one way or right way to do this kind of interpretation, but we can nevertheless observe the behavior and construct meaning that can help us understand and inform scholarly research and practice. It is applying the "how and what" and not the "if and then" perspective (Lin, 1998).

Phenomenology

This study also employs a phenomenological approach to guide me as the researcher to d conduct a thorough examination of the phenomenon. The phenomenon under study is the experience of how mentees understand and engage in the mentoring partnership and how they experience their role in participating in the relationship. I selected a phenomenology approach to develop a deeper understanding of mentees' experiences through rich descriptions of their engagement that may lead to training, development, and information to be shared on how to engage in the partnership. Transcendental phenomenology consists of identification, bracketing, data collection, theme development, textural description, structural description, and the essence of the experience (van Kamm, 1969). This process first allows the researcher to set aside prejudgments in a process called *epoche* and to interview with an unbiased and receptive presence (Moustakas, 1994). By acknowledging my positionality as Director of a mentoring program, this acknowledgement is an important and crucial process which allows me to recognize and set aside my own biases developed over the years of working closely with a mentoring program. Once data collection occurs, the researcher can then begin developing themes through rich descriptions of the study at hand. The shared themes continue to create meaning of the phenomenon at study, as "Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and

concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59). This method allowed me to bring my own interests as an active instrument and guided me and the adjustments I made with the research participants and study in every step of data collection.

The use of phenomenology as a research methodology also acknowledges that research has a personal interest in connecting and making meaning of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). With seven years of experience working with mentoring programs, I have witnessed and developed an inquisitive approach to how mentoring partnerships thrive and fail. My inquisitive approach is what first attracted me to the topic of mentorability and has been a basis in developing research questions through a program director's lens. Understanding how mentees perceive and describe their role and/or qualities can lead to the further preparation of mentees and for mentors. Once a researcher can come to generalize mentees' perceptions, the next step is developing a quantitative survey administered to mentees to help them understand and assess their own mentorability.

Description of Research Site

Texas State University is a public, four-year, doctoral granting institution located in San Marcos, Texas. It is classified as a Doctoral Institution: High Research Activity by the Carnegie Classification (Carnegie Classification, n.d.) and has had a large population of undergraduate student enrollment and rapid growth within the last decade. During the fall 2019 semester, enrollment at the institution consisted of 38,661 students dispersed among eight different colleges and 98 degree programs. Centrally located between two large Metropolitan areas, Texas State University is home to Division I football in the Sun Belt Conference and recruits students from across the state, nationally, and globally. As the fourth largest institution in the state, Texas

State University has continued being a popular choice for undergraduate students in pursuing a higher education.

Originally founded as a teaching college in 1899, Texas State University has undergone six different name changes and experienced rapid growth in enrollment. Forty-six percent of the student population is first-generation and as a minority-majority university, Texas State reflects the state of Texas demographics which is a key component for its selection as the research site. As part of the growth, Texas State University strategically embraced the demographic changes of its student population through intentionally recruiting minority students from across the state. University leadership and the campus community were committed to becoming an HSI and were deliberate in their efforts to support the growing Latinx population in the region and the state (Santiago & Andrande, 2010).

Hispanic Serving Institutions

With the fastest growing ethnic population in the United States, Hispanics are set to be a huge political and economic force to consider in the future direction of our country (Benitez, 1998; de los Santos & Cuamea, 2010). The umbrella term Hispanic, created based on the collective usage of Spanish, is not a homogenous group. It encompasses many individuals and groups with roots from various countries globally. The Hispanic population has continued to increase, including attending and completing degrees at post-secondary institutions (Benitez, 1998; Lucas, 2006). To better serve the growing numbers of Hispanic students in post-secondary institutions, HSIs were established to provide financial strength to those universities serving a larger population of Hispanic students through Department of Education funding. HSIs are defined as degree-granting, non-profit institutions that enroll at minimum 25% of full-time Hispanic undergraduate students (Santiago & Andrade, 2006). A definition established by the

legislature during the reauthorization of the 1992 Higher Education Act provided institutions classified as HSIs eligibility for financial awards intended to build the capacity to serve students. During 2018-2019, 539 HSIs were found in 27 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (Excelencia in Education, n.d.).

The challenges facing HSIs today (since the origins) are continuing to increase as scholars attempt to examine the impact of both academic and non-academic outcomes of the designation. It is not merely how institutions are increasing the educational achievement of Hispanic students but also how they are shaping the identity of what it means to be a Hispanic Serving Institution. For minority serving institutions, receiving additional financial assistance from the Department of Education has enhanced facilities, programs, and services at institutions with the designation. The federal support has continued to provide financial resources for three different types of minority designated institutions: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) since 1867, Tribal Colleges since 1969, and HSIs since 1992 (Wolanin, 1998). There have been many higher education reauthorizations changing the policies and funding opportunities for those under the umbrella of minority serving institutions; however, strengthening the capacity to serve and assist in providing research grants has been a prominent theme despite presidential fluctuation.

Hispanic Serving Institution funding has contributed to positive outcomes specifically for Hispanic students. Moschetti et al. (2018), found that Hispanic, first-generation students benefited from participating in mentoring partnerships, thus adding to the literature examining an underrepresented population. With the increase of HSIs, mentoring programs have become very important to supporting this population who are often also the first in their family to attend college. This study has sought to add to the literature on how mentorability and mentoring can

advance servingness at an HSI, a critical component of defining what it means to be an HSI (Calderón Galdeano et al., 2012; Garcia, 2016). The servingness vs. enrolling debate has placed urgency and emphasis to examining programs funded by Title V at HSIs and how they are serving students.

Texas State University became eligible as an HSI in fall 2010, two years prior to the initial goal of achieving HSI status by 2012. Eligibility for HSI status has allowed the institution to compete for Title III & V funding and secure financial incentives to provide additional services with the intent of building the capacity to serve through learning and achievement. Texas State University received its first HSI Title V grant, Foundations for Student Success: Mentoring and Academic Coaching in 2012 (Title V program, n.d.). The Title V funds have allowed the institution to establish and institutionalize a Mentoring and Academic Coaching program for first-year students. All students participating in the PACE Center receive a dedicated peer mentor and academic coach to assist them during their academic and social transition to Texas State University. Participants of this study represent a direct impact of receiving HSI eligible funding through a Title V grant.

Personalized Academic Career Exploration (PACE) Center

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for reaccreditation for the Southern Association for Schools and Colleges (SACS) for 2012 – 2017 was the Personalized Academic and Career Exploration (PACE). PACE is a one-stop shop for academic and support services for first-year students. First-year students who have 16 or fewer credit hours post-high school graduation are required to participate in the centralized services available at the PACE Center. PACE encompasses five pillars: Academic Advising, Academic Coaching, Career Exploration, Peer Mentors, and University Seminar. A representative from each respective area contributes by

participating in a student success team for each individual PACE first-year student. The success team model is intended to provide a web of intentional support and guidance during a student's social and academic transition. A student's PACE experience begins during New Student Orientation (NSO) where each student receives individual advising during a two-day required NSO session. Their academic advisor provides an academic road map for their degree audit and course planning. During the academic year, the academic coach meets with students based on academic needs and assists students in developing academic tools, such as goal setting, note taking skills, and study skills. A career counselor assists students as they participate in career exploration, including self-assessments and suggestions on potential majors and careers. Peer mentors are upperclassmen embedded in the one-hour required University Seminar course and assist students in and out of the classroom on social belonging and academic enrichment.

Finally, their University Seminar course is taught by a university faculty or staff member. The transitional course is designed with a student's success in mind and focuses on developing purpose and defining success, discernment of career and major choice, and development of their college identity. All first-year students are required to take the University Seminar in the fall semester as space allows. Student's may petition to waive University Seminar, but there is a limited number of exceptions based on prior transferable credit and a student's GPA. Exceptions for the course are at the discretion and academic evaluation of the Associate Dean in University College.

University Seminar

University Seminar is a 35-year established course that meets once a week for 50 minutes during a student's first semester at Texas State University. The University Seminar is a high-impact practice, deeply rooted in the Texas State University culture with the primary goals of

career exploration and assisting in a student's transition to college. Each seminar course is capped at 23 students and the program offers over 290 sections to accommodate the large (5,000 +) first-year class in the fall semester. Students are automatically enrolled in the course and have the option of switching sections prior to the 12th class day. While most of the sections are mixed, several sections are specialized and enroll students based on living arrangements (learning communities), majors, or specific interest (first-generation). Regardless of the specialized section, the seminar course includes a semi-structured curriculum with three overarching umbrella topics: (a) developing purpose and defining success, (b) developing skills and relationships for success, and (c) integrating into the [university] community. During the 14-week course, each weekly topic must fall under one of these umbrella topics. Also included in the course are Career Exploration assignments, the Common Reading Program, and Common Experience. Peer mentors are paired to the course based on availability, faculty/mentor interest, career field, and specific requests. As part of the formal mentoring program, students are required to meet twice with their peer mentor each semester during their first year. The course grading scheme varies by faculty choice but meeting with their peer mentor is a required part of the student's grade.

Peer Mentors

Peer mentors are upperclassman embedded in a University Seminar course and work one-on-one with students throughout their first year. Criteria to be a peer mentor include a minimum of a 3.0 GPA at the university for more than a year and being an active participant of the university community. Selection of peer mentors occurs during the spring semester to serve for the following year. Applicants must participate in a group and individual interview. Once selected, peer mentors are required to participate in a week-long CRLA training prior to the fall

semester. The College Reading Learning Association, International Mentor Training Program Certification requires a minimum 35 + hours of training and accumulating direct mentoring hours throughout the semester (CRLA, n.d.). Peer mentors are assigned to three University Seminar sections and work with approximately 69 students throughout their first year. Peer mentors are paid $10 an hour and matched with University Seminar faculty based on interest and class schedules. The peer mentor position typically draws more women than men to the position. For instance, during the 2019-2020 AY, 77 peer mentors were woman and 18 were men.

Selection of Participants

This research study sought to understand how mentees perceived their ability to engage in a mutually beneficial developmental partnership. To help capture a mentees' perception and description of how they understand their role in the partnership, I attempted to use three different methods in obtaining the data. Initial Survey, Semi-Structured Interviews, and Focus Groups with a card sorting activity. As discussed later, COVID-19 disruptions impacted data collection, so modifications to continue the study were made. The timeline of the study is explained below in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Timeline of Mentorability Research Study

Activity	Task Analysis/Notes	Timeline (2019-2020 AY)
Recruitment of Participants	Purposive and Snowball Sampling	January
Sample Selection	Qualtrics Pre-Interview Survey	January
Individual Interviews	Individual Interviews	January – February
Transcription	Upon Completion of each interview	February – March
Coding	Dedoose	March – April
Focus Group Reminder	By Email	March – April
Focus Group	Focus Group	March – April
Transcription	Upon completion of focus groups	March – May
Coding	Dedoose	March – May
Data Analysis		April – May

The methodology process began with the initial recruitment and screening of participants and was followed by a semi-structured interview as part of a two-part interview process during the spring semester of a student's first year. The initial plan was to have students return to participate in one of several focus groups. As discussed below in detail, COVID-19 impacted the ability to meet in focus groups and participate in the study. The target population for study was 15-20 first-year students. The total number of participants was 17, with 11 completing both portions of the interview process. The participants were students participating in the Personalized Academic and Career Exploration (PACE) program, a required first-year experience program that contains a formal mentoring program.

Data Collection

I used two methods in recruiting participants for the study: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. First, I sought assistance from the Associate Dean of University College, and randomly selected 500 students from the incoming first-year class (Miles et al., 2014). Texas State's 2019 first-year class had 5,000+ students. This purposive sampling was strategic and

purposeful to meet several of my criteria of the study: first-year students enrolled in a freshman seminar course and thus participants in a formal mentoring program at an HSI (Miles et al., 2014). As a staff member of the university, access to this information is easily accessible; however, soliciting the assistance of the Associate Dean for Academic Programs who provided an unbiased selection of participants. By seeking assistance, I decreased any potential bias I had in selecting participants for the study. Once I received a random sample, students received an email letter inviting them to participate in the study (Appendix A). The email specified the purpose for the study, potential risks, and compensation. Compensation for participation in the study was intended to include pizza and drinks during the focus group. However, because of COVID-19, a thank you message for contributing to the research project and subsequent materials was sent to participants.

Secondly, I also used snowball sampling to recruit students through the first-year seminar course they were then currently enrolled in (Miles et al., 2014). By reaching out to their faculty members for assistance with forwarding on the research study, I was able to garner additional students by leveraging their faculty input and solicitation of the study. In addition, I sought assistance from their PACE Academic Advisor for students who might have an interest in the study. My personal network with the faculty and advisor allowed for an additional outreach method; however, it still limited the chance I would not have engaged with the participants prior to participating in the study. As a University Seminar faculty member, I excluded my own seminar sections from the study.

The impact of COVID-19 during data collection limited my ability to connect with all participants for the second interview. First, I made an amendment to IRB confirming that no face-to-face interaction would occur as part of data collection. This included information about

meeting virtually using the *Zoom* online platform. I made modifications to the interview protocol by reaching out to each student individually and meeting their availability for the second interview. All second interviews were done virtually using *Zoom*. I sent weekly reminder emails to students who had not responded. Many students have been impacted by COVID-19 differently. First-year students were asked to move back home, had difficulty with technology or internet services, or may no longer have been interested in participating in the study virtually. I was able to interview six students individually and five more who participated in two focus groups through *Zoom* meetings. Despite the abrupt and unanticipated move to virtual interviews, students did engage and contributed significantly to how they were continuing to make meaning of their mentoring experience through a different modality.

Initial Demographic Survey

Students first participated in the study by completing an initial Qualtrics survey (Appendix B) which provided descriptive information and qualifications for the study. The survey consisted of demographic questions and questions specifically pertaining to their previous participation in a formal mentoring program in the past and participation expectations and commitment for the semester study. The Qualtrics survey helped with confirming the 17 participants for the study.

Based on participation of the Qualtrics survey, the 17 participants were invited to a one-on-one semi-structured interview in the beginning of the spring semester. The initial methodology included focus groups in April' however COVID-19 impacted the process, and both individual and focus groups were adapted to meet the need and availability of participants for the second interview. To initially qualify, participants must have not participated in a formal mentoring program prior to entering into their first year at college, needed to have been in their

first year at Texas State University, and enrolled in a University Seminar course during their first year. The first objective of the "phenomenological approach is the enlarging and deepening of the range of our immediate experience" (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 679). The phenomenological approach included the importance of capturing their lived experiences at two points of time. Therefore, the timing of the study is important; therefore, recruiting participants within the first year of their mentoring experience helped capture their immediate experiences. The email invitation to participate in individual interviews also included information on the best time to conduct the first interview.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Students who met the qualifications were invited back to participate in one-on-one interviews (Appendix C) which were conducted in January and February of a student's first year. Prior to the interview, participants were provided three documents that included an additional document outlining the reason for the study, potential risks, and compensation (Appendix A), a follow up demographic questionnaire (Appendix B), and the IRB form (Appendix D). The demographic questionnaire included specific information about who they are, where they are from, and additional background information (Appendix B) and was intended to confirm their online survey answers. This questionnaire helped with member checking and provided additional trustworthiness for the study (Miles et al., 2014). The in-person questionnaire is important to set the framework, qualify participants, and build a discussion on their lived experiences as part of their first mentoring experience. The second sheet was a consent form adapted from the Texas State University IRB online form (Appendix D). The consent form informed participants of the study's purpose, potential risks, compensation, and the purpose of the data collection (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). Students then confirmed their pseudonym name listed in the Qualtrics survey that was used to protect their identity in any potential published or presentation materials.

Focus Group

Participants were asked to return to one of three virtual focus groups (each focus group was intended to be comprised of four to seven students) in order to collect further data for the research study. The focus group questions were constructed to help understand a mentees' perception in the partnership and to examine how mentees perceive their ability to be mentored and to engage in a developmental partnership during their first year in college and a formal mentoring partnership (Appendix E). The focus group approach and semi-structured questions allowed for initial questions and flexibility for on the spot follow-up questions. The questions allowed participants to guide the feedback and develop findings based on their perceptions. The inductive semi-loosely designed approach (Miles et al., 2014) allowed for flexibility within the focus group in order gather the rawest data. I chose a focus group approach to allow the students to interact with each other to yield the most feedback based on their shared experiences within their individual mentoring partnerships (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the fall 2018 pilot, students were more likely to engage with their peers and contribute more to the dialogue. Thus, focus groups were first presented as an important method of data collection. The plan was to establish a relationship with the students with whom I have had minimal engagement within a smaller setting. Establishing a research relationship can facilitate or hinder the research design (Maxwell, 2013). I wanted to be sure students were comfortable and trusted that I was not there just to gather information but that I had a desire and sincere interest in their shared experiences and how they make meaning to the research questions. Due to COVID-19 only five participants

participated in two focus groups. All other participants who continued with the study were interviewed individually.

Card Sorting Activity

As part of the focus group, mentees participated in a card sorting activity to help determine the most and least important characteristics a mentee must have as part of the partnership (Spradley, 1979; Appendix E). The card sorting activity was modified by listing the characteristics in the *Zoom* chat feature and had students select and discuss their selection. Based on a study on postsecondary mentoring programs' websites' predispositions/mentee characteristics (Taylor & Black, 2018), participants were invited to identify the three most and the three least important characteristics to them as a mentee. The mentee dispositions include (a) professional, (b) communicative, (c) open-minded, (d) committed, (e) responsible, (f) initiative, (g) active, (h) realistic, (i) understanding, (j) available, and (k) willing. Following the activity, I continued to ask questions on their selection and sought additional content as to their rationale for their selection and how it impacts their understanding of their mentorability. These questions helped determine if a program website's listed characteristics are consistent to the mentee's perception of their own views of their role. This was done after all of the interview questions and was intended to draw further conversations about their experiences and what was most and least important in the mentoring relationship.

Data Analysis

This section describes the data analysis process for the study. This process includes the process of transcription, selection of coding software, the coding process, and the development of emergent themes.

Transcription

After the interviews were completed, I either transcribed the interviews myself or sent the audio files to be transcribed using REV's automated transcription services. For the interviews sent to REV transcription, I listened and edited transcription to be sure each participants' comments were accurately transcribed. Both the audio files and written transcription were kept on an encrypted file on my computer and secure web space.

Inductive and Deductive Analysis

For data analysis I used both a deductive and inductive approach at coding (Miles et al., 2014). I initially created several large overarching codes during the process of developing a conceptual map and of determining the research questions and the interview protocol (Appendix F). As part of the deductive analysis several of the coding words used were "interactions," "reciprocity," and "trust." I then used an inductive approach and added sub-codes throughout both the individual interviews, the focus group, and the first and second round of coding. This approach allowed for emergent reoccurring subcodes to be identified to further enhance findings previously not considered during the initial planning of the study (Miles et al., 2014).

Coding Software

I used Dedoose coding software to assist in the coding process and help in analyzing the data. Dedoose was selected for its capability to organize participants of the study and allow for multiple coding methods and met the needs of line by-line analysis critical to the analysis of the data. The secure web-based platform is most used for analyzing qualitative and mixed method research.

Coding

I used two coding techniques simultaneously while analyzing the data. The first technique was a microanalysis "open coding" process as a foundational approach which helped with the categorizing of the phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). Originally used for Grounded Theory, microanalysis allows the research to "break open the data to consider all possible meanings" (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, pg., 59) and to assist in concept development (Struass & Corbin, 1998). Using the deductive codebook developed prior to the study, I assigned codes to participants' words and organized them into categories. Microanalysis allowed for a closer examination of each participant's words and encouraged out of the box thinking that led to additional emergent codes I had not previously considered (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). Coding began after every interview as I was continuously adapting to see what the data were describing.

The second technique I used was an axial coding process. Axial coding "is that act of relating concepts/categories to each other" (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, pg. 198). It allowed me to begin to identify emerging themes and pattern regularities to describe the phenomenon and distinguish shared meaning amongst the participants. Both microanalysis and axial coding were used simultaneously both to link categories and elaborate on them. This coding method was to "indicate to readers that though we break data apart, and identify concepts to stand for the data, we also have to put it back together again by relating those concepts" (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, pg. 198). By using these techniques, I was able to identify common themes that answered each one of my research questions.

As a third round of analysis, I applied both open and axial codes into the theoretical frameworks selected for this study, and I used memos generated after each interview to provide an additional context to address gaps with the frameworks. Both SET and social capital allowed

a further analysis on how mentees assess their own mentorability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specifically, this added analysis allowed for more of an exploration into the concept of mentorability and allowed me to conceptualize it within the SET and social capital framework.

Analysis of Participants

As part of the study, I provided a description of each participant including demographic data and participant profiles. This method is explained in detail in Chapter 4. Chapter four's participant profiles are intended to provide information about their personal self-described demographics, their description of mentoring, the type of relationship they had with their peer mentor, and the level of mentorability. This chapter provides a glimpse of who they are and how they describe facets of mentoring followed by findings in Chapter 5.

Researcher Positionality

As a researcher, it is important to identify and acknowledge a researcher bias prior to the study to help in providing a fresh perspective on the study. Through transcendental phenomenology I have attempted to bracket out my lived experiences to attempt to garner as much of a true and freshly perceived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The technique of bracketing, in and of itself, has received sharp criticism as unattainable from an interpretivism perspective (van Manen, 1990; LeVasseur, 2003) and is believed "impossible to… eliminating a researchers own theories, beliefs and perceptual lens" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). It is therefore important for me as a researcher to acknowledge my subjectivity and my own experiences as part of a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). By doing so, my research positionality consists of reflection on three roles I have experienced in my life: (1) my own personal experiences as a mentee, (2) my own personal and professional experiences as a mentor, (3) my professional experience developing and directing a mentoring program.

I am a product of many educational policy programs for low income, first-generation individuals. I started my educational journey at four-years of age by participating in Head Start programs, continued by receiving a Texas public education, and by my involvement in TRiO, federally funded college access programs, prior to college. These experiences allowed me to find mentors to help guide and educate me in certain aspects of my educational journey. None of these mentors were in a formal mentoring setting or been in an assigned mentor/mentee experience; however, the organic relationships and unofficial mentoring titles from supervisor to coach, guided me from pre-kindergarten through my undergraduate experience. I never received formal mentee training or how to maximize and benefit from the mentorship, but capitalized from individuals who genuinely cared about my success, professional development, and educational opportunities. Looking back, these individuals helped shape my view of how to be a mentee and understand how to be a better mentor as we fumbled through the partnerships.

As a mentor, I have worked with many individuals (undergraduate students, graduate students, and professionals) as part of their developmental journey. From these experiences I have gained experiential knowledge on what qualities mentees possess that make the mentoring partnership stronger and easier. These qualities vary by individual and situation but are grounded on simple constructs, such as communication, vulnerability, and commitment. Given that these constructs are assumptions based on my own personal experiences as a mentor it comes from a subjective viewpoint, and acknowledging these qualities early helped with my own biases as to mentees' roles.

During my undergraduate experience at the University of Texas at San Antonio, I was employed as a Peer Class Leader for a Learning Communities program. I would attend class and work with two groups of up to 30 students as they transitioned to the university. Although my

title did not have “mentor” in it, I still served as a peer mentor in that capacity. From there, I started my professional career in Undergraduate Admissions at Texas State University while obtaining my Master of Education in Counseling and Guidance with an emphasis in Student Affairs at the university. My position in Admissions was first as a graduate assistant for New Student Orientation (NSO) and then as a Coordinator for New Student Orientation upon completion of my master’s program and when a full-time position became available. I oversaw the Orientation Leaders and mentored several of them as they welcomed new freshman to campus during the summer months. The relationships I developed while mentoring the Orientation Leaders did not end after the summer months when NSO concluded, but continued throughout the year, including some relationships that are still going strong today. For over 10 years I have maintained strong mentoring partnerships that are mutually beneficial both for both me and former students and have anecdotally seen what has worked for each of those sustained relationships.

I transitioned from Undergraduate Admissions to University College in 2012 to develop a mentoring program that would assist first-year students. This job allowed me to research best practices, identify various models of mentoring programs, establish a certified training program for the peer mentors, and craft a beneficial and impactful experience for new students. Since the inception of the program, I have recruited, hired, and trained over 400 undergraduate peer mentors through the College Reading Learning Association’s International Mentoring Training Program Certification. My role as the Director of Peer Mentoring has given me the opportunity to present at national conferences on mentoring, a Ted Talk on Mentorability (TED, 2019), and research and publish scholarly articles on mentoring. These experiences allow me to have a

unique perspective and opportunity with first-year students being mentored at Texas State and has helped in the development and design of this research study.

As a practitioner with 10 years of experience in higher education, I have seen the benefits and positive outcomes of mentoring partnerships. I have also witnessed the failures of many mentorships, both in organic and formal relationships. This experience originally led to my curiosity as to what we could we do better to help mentoring partnerships thrive. I have anecdotally witnessed mentoring connections thrive successfully by developing both parties and have seen them miserably fail and exploit mentees. I have developed, along with my team, a Mentorability Tool to help mentors work with mentees who they identify as having a low, moderate, or high investment in the partnership. The unempirical tool was developed to help identify a mentees' mentorability and strategies for working with them. In the future, the mentorability tool may contribute to enhancing training, tools, and partnerships. For now, exploring one's mentorability and understanding the nuances in what and how mentees contribute to a mentoring partnership have been a significant interest in my work and has led me to this topic for the last few years.

Pilot Study

A pilot study to help finalize the research protocol was conducted fall 2018 as part of a qualitative research course. The pilot study allowed me to reflect on my experiences of organizing and conducting a research study from start to finish and to identify potential areas of improvement (Sampson, 2004). From the data collection of seven participants and analysis three themes emerged from the data relevant to addressing my research questions. First, mentees understand that being communicative and open-minded are important factors of reciprocity that actively contribute to the partnership. Secondly, mentees' preconceived perceptions of their

ability to being in a mentoring partnership did impact their mentorability, and third mentees place a high value of trust and support in the partnership. When there is a lack of trust and unwillingness in the relationship it leads to inactive behaviors and disengagement. They are contributing partners in establishing trust through communication, receptiveness, and vulnerability.

In addition, using Taylor and Black's (2018) description of how mentoring programs describe mentees dispositions on their websites, the card sorting activity demonstrated an inconsistent but poignant finding. The top three most frequently described words about mentees' disposition-focused content on both institution and mentoring program type were professional, communicative, and open-minded. While the qualities being communicative and open-minded seem to align with how mentoring partnerships describe mentees in this study. For six out of seven of the participants, professionalism was listed as the least important characteristic mentees needed to bring to the partnership for establishing trust and a relationship. For the one individual who did not list professionalism as the top least important it was nevertheless included in their top three least important. This initial finding indicates that mentoring program websites might be disconnected to how mentees view themselves in the partnership and add to the low trust in the establishment of the partnership. While this pilot study only focused on a small group of students at an HSI institution, my professor suggested future research to continue seeking clarification and adding to the literature on mentees' mentorability upon entering into the partnership. A future research project would also include how training and prior experiences shape mentees' ability to engage in the partnership. Overall, this pilot study experience allowed me to ground my research questions, expand my knowledge in research design, and help further my dissertation

outline and study. I gained much from the individual assignments and classroom/instructor feedback shaping my overall perspective of qualitative research.

Limitations

As with any research study, there exists limitations and delimitations to the study. As researchers, it is important to acknowledge and assist in mitigating these challenges. Limitations are beyond the control of the researcher while delimitations are decisions that are within the scope of the researcher but may also impact findings for the study. Two limitations arose as part of the study, unknown language and the COVID-19.

The mentoring umbrella encompasses a vast number of roles, functions, and designs spanning many decades of work. It can be challenging to narrow down a study reflective of previous research and encompassing many different mentoring designs with results for all mentees. As a consumer of literature, there is very limited research examining mentees' experiences at the beginning of the relationship or other mechanisms for describing a mentee's role in the partnership. As a result, discussing mentorability with a mentee can be a new concept not fully understood by the participants.

Second, due to COVID-19, initial data collection was interrupted, and six participants did not participate in the second interview. Additional modifications were made on the second interview to accommodate participants' availability and technology concerns. This modification included changing the research design from focus groups to a combination of focus groups and interviews. The second limitation was using snowball sampling during the recruitment of participants. Several recommendations were provided to me by US 1100 faculty members and Academic Advisors. These participants were actively engaged in class or advising sessions and

might have had pre-dispositions to actively participate in college experiences, including as a research participant.

Delimitations

Two delimitations arose as part of this research study. The scope of this study focused on a small sample of first semester, first-year students at an HSI in the American Southwest. As a result, this study is delaminated by sample selection, sample size, and recruitment methods and provides a theoretical understanding for future research. It is not intended to categorize qualifications needed for participating in a mentoring partnership.

The institutional type was the sample selected due to my familiarity with the university and continues to be a space where I am continuously improving the mentoring program and culture at the institution. The type of institution may prevent the opportunity to apply results to other institutions; however, Texas State University is classified as a Hispanic Serving Institution (Texas State University, 2020), and the student population closely resembles the state of Texas demographics. As "Texas is expected to experience an unprecedented amount of growth over the next 30 years…predominantly in the Hispanic population…that means…600,000 more (Hispanics) in Texas" (de los Santos & Cuamea, 2010, p. 105). Therefore, allowing mechanisms and strategies that support student success, like mentoring, will become valuable assets in achieving state priorities for educational prosperity.

Although the sample size intended of the study also delimits the potential of findings becoming generalizable, the purpose of qualitative studies is to understand the phenomenon occurring and identify shared meaning among participants (Moustakas, 1994). The in-depth, data rich intention is meant to begin uncovering a new phenomenon that mentees experience and may

lead to a discussion on how mentees own mentorability. This discoverable phenomenon is described in this study and may contribute to their understanding of the partnership.

In additional delimitation is the recruitment method used in garnering participation, a method, which may lead to mentees who are more extraverted in nature and eager to participate in the interview and partnership but who have had no previous mentoring experience. Understanding that all mentoring partnerships are unique complicates matters because a description of a partnership may not capture all personality types and therefore provide a limiting perception of those who are actively engaged in absorbing college life. Someone who is not as extraverted and who may not have participated does not equate to them not being mentorable or benefiting from a mentoring partnership. In addition, participants previously engaged in a formal mentoring partnership were not eligible to participate. Since a major focus of the study was having participants with no previous experience in a partnership, the experiences of students with previous experiences may have unduly influenced other peers who contributed to the research study.

Ethical and Quality Considerations

One of the biggest challenges of the study was to establish trustworthiness in connecting with first-year students so they could feel comfortable and able to communicate their lived experiences in a mentoring partnership. This attempt to establish trustworthiness was mitigated by connecting with them beyond the scope of the study about their experiences as a first-year student and as students in transition to remote learning. By identifying potential threats to the study as a researcher, I developed ways to attempt to rule out or lessen the impact of the particular threat (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014).

Reflexivity and Reactivity

I am aware I am immersed in mentoring in my day-to-day operations and that my title and role may be considered a threat to the trustworthiness of my findings. Participants may want to describe what I want to hear as a researcher and not describe their own experiences and avoid their true opinions to questions being asked. leading to reflexivity (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006; Maxwell, 2013). Reflexivity "involves deconstructing who we are and the ways in which our beliefs, experiences and identity intersect with that of the participant" (Lietz et al., 2006 p. 447). Therefore, their responses may be influenced and socially desired by the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). These challenges provide a threat to trustworthiness and enable me to reflect and be cognizant of my research practices. By communicating that I am a doctoral student and not a director while conducting the interviews may limit socially desired responses.

Trustworthiness

To combat some of the challenges and threats that arose as part of the study, careful consideration was used in establishing trustworthiness. I used four strategies to help establish trustworthiness throughout the data collection including respondent validation, thick descriptions, triangulation, and peer debriefing (Hays & Singh, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). Trustworthiness was an important element of the study as I sought to provide an ethical and thorough account of the participants voices.

Respondent Validation

Before, during, and after each interview and focus group, I took detailed memos about the environment and my interpretation of participants responses. This practice assisted me in acknowledging my position as a key component of the phenomenological approach with my participants at the beginning of the study as part of the overall protocol and goals of the study

(Moustakas, 1994). I wanted participants to be aware that the sensitive information being shared with me was validated in support of their lived experiences and provided a context to their stories for the study. I continuously referenced previous answers for employing member checking throughout the multiple interviews to help mitigate misinterpretation in capturing their intended responses.

Thick Data Description

I also used open-ended questions to allow for a thick description so as not to not to curtail any desirable responses (Maxwell, 2013; Merton, Fiske & Kendall 1990; Miles et al., 2014). To ensure data collection is relevant to my study, I continued asking probing questions during the interview that allowed for a more thorough and thick description from the participants for clarification, thus allowing a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon at study (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014).

Triangulation

In addition, triangulation allowed me to collect information by using several varieties of methods (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014; Fielding & Fielding, 1986). First, I sent a demographic questionnaire to identify participants that met my criteria. By interviewing participants both individually twice, I was able to rely on lengthy data transcriptions and intensive details including follow-up questions, to help in developing themes of the study. During the second interview I asked follow-up questions to gather data at an additional point of the mentees' mentoring experience.

Peer Debriefing

Finally, peer debriefing with other colleagues allowed me to check the ethical validation, an initial and principal challenge of my study (Maxwell, 2013). This strategy includes discussing

my study with my dissertation committee members and other active colleagues in the mentoring field. This debriefing allowed me to gain rigorous feedback and helped identify biases, flaws, and or assumptions I may have encountered during the design, findings, and conclusions of the study. Each trustworthy approach allowed me to become more credible and strengthened the findings by grounding them in strategies conducive to the research design.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed overview on the methodological procedures used in conducting the research study. Texas State University was selected as the research site, and 17 students participated in the study. Data collection occurred over the spring 2020 semester and was modified due to the impact of COVID-19. I shared information about my positionality and how a pilot study helped inform the design of the research study. Then, I used both an open and axial coding strategy that allowed for engaging emergent themes of the study. Finally, limitations and delimitations were discussed as well as the ethical and quality considerations that were used. Chapter 4 provides detailed information about each research participant.

Chapter 4: Mentee Profiles

This chapter describes the 17 research participants including demographic and narrative profiles. The first section includes demographic information on participants including their major at the time of interviews, race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and immigration status. The participants are first listed in a table format (Table 4.1) followed by descriptive narratives in the second section.

Participants at a Glance

All the participants in the study were undergraduate, first-year students, who enrolled in a University Seminar section in fall 2019 or spring 2020. They completed an online questionnaire that captured additional information that was explicitly not asked for during the individual interviews. Students first selected a pseudonym that was used throughout the two interviews.

All but two students were in-state students. The two students who listed their hometown as out-of-state came from California and Oklahoma. Nine out of 17 students identified as Hispanic, and 70% identified as first in their family to attend college. Ten participants identified their gender as a man and seven identified as being a woman.

Table 4.1. List of Participants

Pseudonym	College	County of Residence	Hispanic	Race	First - Gen Status	Gender Identity	Immigration Status
Abdul	Business	Large Urban County	No	Black or African American	Yes	Man	Citizen
Adam Wallace	Business	Mid-Size Urban County	Yes	Other	Yes	Man	Citizen
Adrian	Liberal Arts	Suburban County	No	Asian	No	Man	Citizen
Adrian R.	Liberal Arts	Large Urban County	Yes	White	No	Man	Citizen

Table 4.1. List of Participants (continued)

Brielle	Liberal Arts	Out of State	No	Black or African American	Yes	Woman	Non-Immigrant
Camila	Fine Arts	Large Urban County	Yes	White	Yes	Woman	International
Jake	Undecided	Mid-Size Urban County	Yes	White	Yes	Man	Citizen
JB	Business	Large Urban County	No	Black or African American	Yes	Woman	Non-Immigrant
Lala	Natural Science	Large Urban County	No	White	No	Man	Citizen
Leaf	Business	Mid-Size Urban County	Yes	White	Yes	Man	Citizen
Lenny	Applied Arts	Out of State	Yes	White	Yes	Woman	Citizen
Moon	Fine Arts	Mid-Size Urban County	No	White	No	Woman	Citizen
Oz	Natural Science	Mid-Size Urban County	No	Asian	Yes	Man	Citizen
Ron	Natural Science	Rural County	Yes	White	Yes	Man	Citizen
Sarah	Fine Arts	Large Urban County	Yes	White	No	Woman	Citizen
Steve	Liberal Arts	Large Urban County	No	White	Yes	Man	Citizen
Yair	Fine Arts	Large Urban County	Yes	White	Yes	Man	Citizen

Participant Profiles

The following section provides profiles of each of the 17 participants. The profiles include information about their personal self-described demographics, their description of

mentoring, the type of relationship they have with their peer mentor, and their level of mentorability. This section provides a glimpse of who they are and how they describe facets of mentoring.

The self-described demographics includes information about their gender identity, race/ethnicity, first-gen status, and major. Also included is information about my own view of the participants and their engagement of their study as garnered from our interactions. The description of mentoring captures how they view mentoring overall, specifically in a peer-to-peer relationship. The profile also describes what type of relationship they have with their peer mentor and the frequency of engaging in the partnership. Finally, an idea of their level of mentorability and how they describe their role in the mentoring relationship are discussed. These descriptive narratives describe who they are as a person, their lived experiences in a mentoring relationship, and their role in order to provide an additional context of this study's participants.

Abdul

Abdul was a Business major from a large urban county and identified as Black or African American. He was a first-generation college student and was enrolled in a first-year seminar fall 2019. He was quiet, sincere, and involved in fraternity life on campus. He also was engaged in intramural sports and involved with his residence hall. His desire to participate in the study demonstrated his ability to connect to the campus experience and develop relationships with different people. It was important for him to be social and make the most out of his college experience.

Description of Mentoring

Abdul saw his mentor as someone he could count on. Someone who very early on exchanged a phone number with him, and who would help whenever he encountered a problem or if anything "bad happened" to him. As Abdul described:

> There's always stuff that you don't really know until someone tells you. Like, every week there's always events. She lets us know that, and she makes sure we're on top of the stuff such as grades, events that we need to be attending and she'll just look out [for] us.

He described mentoring as a process and his peer mentor as someone that's already: "adapted to [college] and has had experiences." Mentoring at times was strictly academically related and taught him new techniques and skills to be successful in and out of the classroom. It was important for him to make the most out of his college experience and he saw mentoring as a bridge to unknown possibilities and opportunities.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Abdul met twice with his mentor - the minimum requirement - but enjoyed meeting with her. During the first interview he was going to reach back out to set up a spring meeting with her. The emails he received from his peer mentor were informative and part of the mentorship experience. He was eager to respond to her emails and set up meetings when it was required. During his meetings with his peer mentor, it was:

> Just a time to talk. It's 30 minutes as a minimum amount of time, and it's just a time to talk about what's going on and what's happening so far. It can be about school related or not school related. They definitely go by quick.

The mentoring experience for Abdul also included attending events with his mentor and engaging out of the classroom in group mentoring with his peers.

Mentorability

Abdul had difficulty understanding how he could contribute to the relationship at first. He described his role as the "inexperienced student getting introduced to the school." He also saw the relationship as one-directional. The information the mentor provided him was meant to help him transition successfully. When asked if he has taught her anything his response focused solely on academics:

> I don't think I've taught her anything yet, but I do believe that there'll be a time where I teach her something because we have different majors...she's a mass communications major and I'm an accounting major, so we're like in just completely different spectrums of the, um, of this institution that we're in. I believe that I could teach her something because we're both studying different things right now.

His mentorability and understanding his contributions were in the early development stage. He is highly invested in the partnership, yet he did not see how he provided insight, value, or experiences to his mentor.

Adam Wallace

Adam Wallace was a Business major who identified as a Hispanic man from a large urban county. He was sweet, energetic, and engaged with me almost immediately after we met. He talked about enrolling in the fall semester and looking for apartments off campus to move in with his buddies. He was active in high school football and participated in intramural sports in college. Many of his comments drew from similar experiences engaging in a coach-player relationship.

Description of Mentoring

Adam Wallace saw his peer mentor as someone who was resourceful because of her position within the university. He did not think the university would put someone in a mentoring

role if they were not trained or equipped to help him transition. He saw his mentor as a friend but also a person that gave advice. As he described:

> The advice from their experiences at college can teach us what and what not to do so we don't make the same mistake they did. Or just put us on a better path. Or just to get a better understanding of college and how everything works. I can go ask questions, and it's not a bad thing to have more knowledge.

The guidance provided to Adam Wallace was beneficial for his first year and helped him develop a relationship with his peer mentor.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Adam Wallace was hesitant at first to meet with his mentor and really had to shift his mindset to viewing her as value-added rather than just viewing meeting with her as another thing to do. When he finally overcame the hesitation, his relationship with his peer mentor was very friendly and they communicated periodically throughout his first year. He knew she was there to help him accomplish a goal. He equated mentoring to being in a coach-player relationship. When asked about mentoring, he said:

> Like coaches, just making sure you're doing the right thing, even though they yell at you sometimes…; eventually you get it, and you feel better about it, and you get more trust from the team and the coaches that you're going to do your job well.

Adam Wallace's coach analogy contributed to his ability to engage in a goal-oriented relationship with his mentor. The more receptive and active he was with his mentor's advice the more advantageous his first year was.

Mentorability

Adam Wallace knew the importance of establishing a relationship early and became more comfortable engaging in the partnership. He saw the relationship as a partnership in which he equally contributed to the outcome. He described his contribution as:

> A mutually beneficial relationship so we can learn from each other. You know, support each other if we need to…. She can give me the tools that might help me with schooling or advice that might help me with - time management, and then I can provide the social skills of what she needs to get done.

He also felt he contributed by giving advice to his mentor about how to communicate with mentees better and more efficiently. He was also compassionate and respectful of her time and additional responsibilities. As much as he wanted to follow her advice, he knew that communication and his role in the partnership were ultimately up to him.

Adrian

Adrian began his college career during the spring 2020 semester. He identified as an Asian man from a suburban area, and he was majoring in a Liberal Arts degree with the intent of going on to medical school. He took some time off after high school and at the time of the study was enrolled in a spring US 1100 section with a peer mentor. Adrian was excited to begin his collegiate career and eager to participate in the research study.

Description of Mentoring

When talking to his peer mentor, he described his mentor as a lower level of authority and easier to talk to because no one wants to go to the top first when they have a problem. Adrian also talked about the importance of relatability with someone else. As he communicated:

> The more you can relate to someone, the more you feel comfortable with them, right? That you can just ask them whatever you want, you know. Or they have to be worried that they might think you're stupid or something.

He also saw mentoring as real time help with things you might not understand that extend beyond academics: "In some way, everyone is a mentor to you."

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

During the first interview, Adrian had not made any contact with his mentor. He realized he did not take advantage of prior mentoring relationships and that putting in effort now was only going to help him learn and grow, so he was eager to meet with them. As he described:

> I'm still trying to figure out how best to study and all that. So, having someone that can show me in particular what I should be doing is just going to help draw the line these next few years. It was just like, yea, I did those things, and I should have been doing this the whole time. So not having to waste time trying to figure it out.

By the second interview he had participated in study hall hours, engaged with her more regularly, and saw her as someone to help him be more efficient with his work. He wanted to take advantage of the resource as much as he could because he knew these resources were only available to him for a year.

Mentorability

During our first meeting he had not met with his peer mentor, and when asked about how to first approach the partnership, he discussed not knowing exactly what to do or how to take that first step. Yet he described collaboration as an important contribution to the partnership:

> I think the effort to learn and soak in everything they have and ask questions and make sure you understand what they're talking about. Cause you know, they put in a lot of time and effort to give me it. So it's only respectful to do the same.

Respect was as important throughout his mentoring experiences, which is how he made meaning of the partnership. He wanted to be respectful of the time and information he was receiving from his mentor. When it came to describing what the most important contributing factors were, he shared that willingness to actively participate and communicate are what really made his mentoring relationship work.

Adrian R.

Adrian R. identified as a White man from a large urban county in Texas. He was majoring in a Liberal Arts degree and enrolled in a fall 2019 US 1100 section. He was personable, engaging to talk to, and receptive to his peer mentor's feedback. He appreciated help from his mentor and other support services on campus yet did not know how he contributed to a mentoring relationship.

Description of Mentoring

Adrian saw mentoring as having a friend who contributed to his experiences and a mentor as someone who provided another perspective and helped him understand something new. To him:

> Mentoring is just like being there, guiding someone who basically doesn't have experience in, like, a certain thing that the [mentor] does. Just helping [the mentee] do the process of that situation, whatever it has to be, and that's being a first-year student.

He placed value in his peer mentoring relationship because he was more comfortable in talking to someone closer to his age.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Initially Adrian had two peer mentors during the first few weeks. His first peer mentor did not have contact with him, but when he switched US 1100 sections, he received additional information and made a connection to his new peer mentor right away. Adrian R. also had many group meetings and connected with his peers in a group mentoring setting. As he described:

> When I switched seminar classes, I already had some friends in there, and they were already close with her. So, like, I trusted, I trusted their trust in her. And so, I just built that off of them. And then I realized, as we got closer, that she was someone I could trust based on her personality and everything.

Adrian found his peer mentor fun and outgoing, someone with a similar personality that would fit into his friend group. This made the connection easier.

Mentorability

Adrian knew that maintaining communication was an important part and was part of his role in contributing to the partnership. When asked how he defined mentoring, he said:

> I think it's like a two-way thing because if the mentee doesn't have, like, motivation, I guess, to go to them, then the mentor can't do their job. So, they both have to be participating to make it work.

In addition, actively communicating to his mentor was something he found very important and contributed to his relationship and level of engagement with his mentor.

Brielle

Brielle was a Liberal Arts major from Oklahoma. She identified as a Black or African American woman and was a first-generation college student. She was vibrant, energetic, and willing to be mentored. Her faith was something she continuously shared as important to her and something she described as familiar ground with her peer mentor. During the interviews, she mentioned she would be transferring to an institution in her home state because she would like to be closer to home and because of the spring COVID-19 experience.

Description of Mentoring

Brielle was receptive and open to the idea of being in a mentoring relationship. She described the relationship in the following way:

> Mentoring is being a supportive figure in a person's life…;whether that be in academic or any other aspect…it's an important aspect that many people need because it's just extra support, that somebody who is there for you…and you can be as personal or, say closed off, but it's confidential basically.

She also found being in a peer-to-peer relationship better than other support relationships on campus because you can relate to a peer on a certain level that you might not get from an authoritative figure.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Brielle had a great experience with her peer mentor and categorized it as “a safe space for her [as a mentee], to be honest.” Brielle and her peer mentor had met three times and had found common ground with their faith, and it was only after they started having dialogue, that she found the value of peer mentoring. Brielle understood the reciprocity and discussed frequently asking her mentor how she was doing because she was a person, too. She also elaborated on what prevented her from talking to her mentor by saying:

> Recently, I've realized that I do have a pride problem, and I want to be teachable and I do believe that, like, while my first reaction might be like, “Well I don't care. I know I'm not going to listen to you.” I do believe that I'm slowly but surely chipping that away and being open and being willing to listen and have critiques.

One of her early realizations participating in a mentoring relationship was needing to be vulnerable.

Mentorability

Brielle described her role as being transactional. In order for mentoring to occur at some level, she also needs to communicate information to her mentor about herself. As she shared:

> My role in this is to help them help me, by giving them information. If someone doesn’t let them mentor in on any level, then it’s kind of a waste of time. That person is just talking at you cause they don’t have anything to go off of per se.

She recognized the importance of being open towards her mentor and willing to talk to someone about it. She strongly affirmed that once someone is willing to talk about themselves and their experiences, only then will growth occur.

Camila

Camila was a Fine Arts major from a large urban county. She identified as Hispanic and is undocumented. She approached participating in an interview with consistency and eagerness. She also was drawn to learn everything she could to help her younger siblings. She mentioned

several times the importance of learning all she could to help them to attend college too. As a first-generation student, she frequently contacted her mentor and saw her mentor as a lifeline to successfully complete her first year.

Description of Mentoring

Camila described her relationship with her mentor as working with an older brother/sister, as someone to help her, guide her, and help her grow as a person. Family was something very important to her and was woven into her interviews explicitly, referencing siblings and the importance of family numerous times. For her mentoring was:

> Guiding me because I didn't have someone in my family to go through that. So, like having a mentor, someone that already knew how to do it, helped me. Someone that is more experienced and is passing that to someone without all those experiences, who is about to experience all of that.

A peer mentor was a beneficial resource to her throughout her college experience, and she was actively engaged in the partnership and appreciated when her mentor reached out to her.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Camila met in person with her mentor twice during the fall semester and communicated frequently by text in the spring semester. The face-to-face meetings lasted at least an hour and half each time, and she described them as very helpful and looked forward to meeting with her mentor. As a first-generation college student, she also found her mentor to be highly reliable:

> I thought at first this was going to be like, like a teacher, but then the mentor became like, like someone you can really, really rely on. My writing and putting myself out there too, like in college and in job applications, and to really, really talk about myself. She'd say, "Like, we have to brag about ourselves." So, it's kind of giving me the confidence I needed.

As she continued to heed the advice of her mentor, she continued building her confidence as a student.

Mentorability

At first, Camila thought her role consisted of being inquisitive, continuing to ask questions, and absorbing answers. When asked what she brought to the relationship her response was one directional:

> My ability to learn, my motivation to learn, and listen to the tips and things from her. I feel like everyone gets something from each peer mentor. So maybe she has gained something from me. I don't know what that is, but maybe she did.

She then continued describing how she would listen to her peer mentor open up about her personal life and facts that helped her connect to her mentor on a deeper level. Mentoring was already a resource for her, but she became more interested in the partnership, because of her mentor. Throughout the mentoring process, Camila found the relationship to be mutual, and she discussed how she felt her peer mentor also began to confide in her.

JB

JB was a first-generation college student and identified as Black or African American. She was a Business major from a large urban county. She initially wanted to leave the university and move closer to home but was influenced by her mentor to stay and get involved on campus, which she has enjoyed. She is sweet, invested in her time on campus, and wanted to continue her education for the greater good.

Description of Mentoring

JB described mentoring as a friend you can go to that will help you be successful on campus, not only for academic concerns in finding an accountability partner, but for social integration and connecting to the campus community. When asked about how she described her mentor, JB said:

> I consider mine a good friend. A provided friend, and they are there to purposely give advice if needed, talk things out, give guidance in answering any questions that I would have that I wouldn't know what direction to go to or who to ask.

It was important for JB to have someone she knew she could instantly go to with questions or concerns, and for her, that person was her mentor. The idea of having someone always available and willing to help her, was critical during her first year.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

JB's mentor had a big impact on her ability to find a home at Texas State. Through conversations, JB was willing to share her isolation with her mentor, and as a first-generation student, her peer mentor helped her find community at Texas State by joining a student organization. This led to her finding friends and to her commitment to continue her education at the institution. As JB shared:

> So last semester, I was really confused about if I wanted to transfer and stuff. And she really talked to me and helped me figure out what I wanted to do….She helped me because, you know, showed me organizations to get involved in stuff…,and then I started making friends and liking the campus more.

When interacting with her mentor, JB described meeting:

> Anywhere on campus that was available and convenient for both of us. They weren't the longest meetings and went smooth, like really meeting a friend for a conversation. And she was really, like, checking on me, checking on my grades. I didn't feel forced, but nobody checks on me other than my mom. Like when my mom asks about grades, I need to say, "I'm passing." When my peer mentor asks and I'm not passing, she's like, "Okay well you have all these resources; you can be doing all this and like get it together." So, it was kind of like a good thing. I didn't feel like she was crossing the line.

She was also motivated by seeing her mentor doing well in college. If the peer mentor was able to be successful and manage working and getting involved on campus, she could also do it.

Mentorability

JB recognized that she contributed to the partnership a little later than her peers. It took her awhile to realize exactly how she participated in the partnership. She came to the realization

that in order for the mentoring relationship to work, she needed to contribute by communicating and being respectful of her mentor. In connecting with her mentor, it was “just receptive and responsive because it's a two-way street. So, like if I’m not talking to him, blocking his questions, then it’s not really a relationship.” She also commented on the importance of wanting to build a relationship. The mentee had to talk to her mentor, but it was her choice to build a relationship with her mentor, and vice-versa.

Jake

Jake was undecided and exploring his major and options during his first year. He was a first-generation college student, a Hispanic man from a mid-size urban county. He found a friend in his peer mentor.

Description of Mentoring

Jake’s mentor was influential in his first year. The mentor motivated him to stay on track to meet program requirements and assisted with his social integration to campus. Mentoring to Jake was being in a relationship with someone who was going out of their way to take time and teach him how to have a better experience during his first year. When asked about mentoring, he said:

> My [mentor] influenced me to make sure I'm on the right track and to keep on everything cause I have a lot more free time than I did in high school. So, like they influenced me to keep a better track of where I’m at with grades, time management, and not being a procrastinator. And just overall being able to have a positive impact in the university.

Mentoring was a big part of his first year because it was helpful to have someone who knows what they're doing and be a guide to help him where he wanted to go. The mentoring relationship became a comfortable space for him to confide in and explore some of his challenges he was experiencing.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Jake's mentor made him feel like he belonged at the university and was someone he could go to when he needed help and advice. More importantly, his mentor was someone he connected to and confided in about his academic struggle and transition issues. Jake described:

> [My mentor] to me was like a connected role, like being able to have someone that's, that knows what you're going through that you have certain questions. You go to them and they can help you in that particular area and just make you feel connected to the campus more….If you are someone like me, that has trouble in certain subjects of class, then you know where to go to get the help and just to be more involved in the school. To be connected with more people, especially if you're going somewhere farther from home and you don't have a lot of people that you know.

Distance away from family and friends enhanced Jake's relationship with his mentor. He knew she was someone who cared for his success and that he was more likely to open up and engage in the partnership because he did not have someone like her in college yet. He felt he had a stronger emotional connection with his peer mentor because they were closer in age and he could relate to her experiences much more. His peer mentor could help with internships, meeting new people, and connecting to resources. He would not have otherwise sought any of these options if he did not have a mentor.

Mentorability

Jake provided several examples of how he felt the relationship was mutually beneficial and how he contributed to the growth and development of the mentorship. Jake felt his mentor was someone he could trust and confide in. When asked how he was able to connect with his mentor, Jake said:

> She just gives off, just like one of the best vibes I've ever had for somebody. And you just really connect with them on a level that you just feel like you can talk to them about anything. So yeah, I can definitely trust my friend.

Jake also talked about leaning on her for advice. He knew he needed to ask for her advice but felt he could teach her something because it's more about a "reciprocated relationship" and he needed to do his part. He was hopeful he could "bring something to the table so that she'll be aware and [I could] help her." His description demonstrated his ability to care and provide something back to the relationship.

Lala

Lala is a Natural Science major from a large urban county. He identifies as a White man and was enrolled in US 1100 in fall 2019. He was vibrant, full of life, and a devoted Christian. He understood the importance of being vulnerable and being open. He struggled to understand the reciprocity in the relationship at first, but he saw the benefit of being in a mentoring relationship and having multiple mentors in his life. Life has given him many obstacles, but he has chosen to be resilient and has overcome challenges and chooses to be happy every day. College for him is a forced environment where people from a variety of backgrounds all collide in one space to learn from each other.

Description of Mentoring

Lala was very much a sponge in his approach to college and to being in a mentoring relationship. He found learning about other people fascinating and as he described:

> [Mentoring] is essentially having an older sibling. Like when you have an older sibling, you've seen what their, what your parents yelled at them for. So, you're like, "Okay, I'm not going to do that or I'm going to be more discreet about that one." And so, having someone who's an upperclassman be able to give advice, and especially my peer mentor who is actually in the same major as me. She's also a STEM major. So, I very much lucked out that she was able to help me in that aspect.

He also appreciated and acknowledged the experience his mentor brought to the relationship. As he describes: "time between two people when there's someone who's a year older or 10 years older because they have so much more experience." He wanted the new generation to grow and

exceed where other generations have failed. He felt mentoring contributed to those changes and appreciated how his mentor shared challenges and how they overcame and persevered through those challenges.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Lala's mentor happened to also be his lab instructor, so he saw her contribute to his first-year experience in two different ways. This dual role was very different from any other participant in the study, likely because he was in a specific US 1100 section dedicated to STEM students who had a specialized peer mentor. Her impact was instrumental in the transition for Lala. He described their relationship as something where:

> [The mentor] helped make it go so much more smoothly. Like, my first semester went great because I had my peer mentor from US 1100 class, and it just made everything so much less stressful because already there was someone who was reaching out to me and, like, checking up on me, making sure I was okay, and it was pleasant. It was really nice. It was really nice.

Lala's mentor not only provided advice on which faculty to take but also offered opinions that he found very beneficial to how he approached his academics and social life. His mentor passed the torch to help him, helped him learn from his mistakes, and helped him do better because the "point of being a mentor is to help people be better than you." His mentor was very fluid in how she approached her mentorship and wanted to help adapt her style to his needs, and this had a huge impact on how he approached their relationship.

Mentorability

Lala understood that his mentor had other mentees she was working with and he respected that immensely. By being open to her suggestions, he knew it was only going to help him grow. Lala also talked about his approach to many of his relationships in life and how they mirrored his mentoring partnerships. As he describes:

> I was always raised that the easiest way to anyone's heart is by being vulnerable. And so, whenever I meet new people, I don't have any guards up. And it's been very, so far, very successful for me. I've made a lot of friends because they appreciate that and respect that. I have yet to see why people find shame in being vulnerable.

He approached life being vulnerable and open to an individual's criticism, advice, and various approaches to situations. Regardless of his mentor, he demonstrated qualities of being receptive to a relationship, by the ability to heed advice and the importance of being vulnerable to benefit from his current situation. He also talked about helping his mentor grow by sharing his own experiences. He wanted to help her as much as she helped him grow and develop during their time in the partnership.

Leaf

Leaf was active in the Army Reserve, from a mid-sized urban county, and a Business major. He was an older first-year student, and spring 2020 was his first semester enrolled in University Seminar and at Texas State. He identified as Hispanic man, and as a first-generation college student. He was eager to engage in the partnership but a bit reserved to use it to its full advantage.

Description of Mentoring

Leaf saw mentoring as an instrumental tool during his first semester in college. Mentoring meant having someone he could go to for questions on books, college paraphernalia, and in-class support. As he described:

> Since I am a freshman, and I'm very new in a way, for like classes getting around the school, even if it's like finding a textbook or finding a building, the mentor can actually help me out and tell me, "Oh no, this will be the best route, but you also have these options. This textbook is good, but if you're looking for a way to save money, I recommend these websites." So, your mentor can help out incoming new freshmen learn, I guess an easier way to survive college life.

Surviving college and thriving were things Leaf was motivated to do. He saw the mentoring relationship as someone who gave advice and contributed to his first year through helpful tips and advice that had been passed down from previous mentor to mentee relationships. For him, once information was shared with him, there was a moral duty to share the information with others. He even mentioned becoming a peer mentor was something he was compelled to do.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Communication was something important he had with his mentor, and he realized she was a person just like him. The more he engaged with her, the more she contributed to his first semester's in and out of the classroom experience. When asked how his interactions were going, Leaf explained that:

> When I think academics, I only think of tutoring. I don't know why. She also mentioned like study sessions. You know, different ways to study, which I feel I'm going to end up asking for that sooner or later.

By the time we met for the second time their relationship evolved to more than just talking about academics, which is what he initially thought. They were engaged in conversations about majors, life, and how remote learning was going to work. She became a trusted guide through the COVID-19 pandemic. He learned he was able to pause, look around, assess his different options, and retain and absorb as much information to share with others in the future. His mentor invested in him so that he could invest in others.

Mentorability

Leaf understood that in order to make the most out of the mentoring relationship, it was important to give continuous feedback to his mentor. When asked how to improve a mentoring relationship, Leaf commented:

> I can kind of, you know, give feedback like, or those two different things, or information where I can go with what I have in my head. Just kind of explain it to see where my mentor can help me out. And if I'm not getting enough feedback, kind of give my 2 cents

> and I'll tell my mentor, "I'm asking for this, but you're kind of not giving it to me." So, they can end up helping out others more. So, it's kind of like a two-way street to work on.

He also was able to understand that like any relationship, mentoring took time to evolve and form a deeper connection to this valuable resource. For it to grow, he had to be open and vulnerable to her feedback.

Lenny

Lenny was a Hispanic first-generation college student, Applied Arts major, and originally from California. She was energetic and was eager to share her experiences and contribute to the conversation. At first, she described herself as "shy, but I'm starting now to open up more like in discussion and to share my opinions and ideas because that's what my mentor taught me."

She had thoughtful ideas and great anecdotes about how she sees mentoring relationships. She sought out her mentor more times than usual and considered these times as a toolbox with helpful information.

Description of Mentoring

Lenny described mentoring as a natural partnership with someone who was on her level. To her, mentoring was a friendship she could count on and also a relationship she could contribute to. She described [mentoring] as:

> Having a person we could count on when you have questions, like a tool in your toolbox. I think of [mentoring] as taking another tool in my toolbox. I was like, if I ever need help, I pull one out, and I go ask people. That's how I think of mentoring.

Her depiction of a toolbox was something she continually referred back to. It was important for her to see the mentoring relationship as something she could have at her disposal and saw it as something to help her fix or improve her first year.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

In the early start of the mentoring relationship, Lenny saw her mentor as a friend when she did not have many friends yet. As their relationship evolved, she continued to confide in her mentor as she received academic advice. She continued to describe the relationship as:

> Personally, for me, it's just like having that backbone where you're like, I could fall in a moment. I could text my mentor and be like, "I'm stuck in this situation. Like, what do I do? Like work, where can you lead me to?" It's like having that support. I think it is like having that first friend and like the first moment you came here, so this person knows me from nothing, and like now knows me, how I am as a student and as a person. The [mentor] got to know me. So, having that, like, that relationship, that friendship, but also having that like mentor, mentee relationship. You understand they have their life too, in their work so that you can't always rely on them, but they're there. Like if you need their advice on school and work.

Lenny's mentor helped her build confidence she needed when she first arrived at Texas State, and although she knew her mentor also had other responsibilities and other mentees, she served as a safety net for her. As a first-gen, proud Latina, the cultural connection she had with her mentor was important to her. In a space she wasn't completely comfortable in, she confided to her mentor some of the struggles she was experiencing. Her mentor was able to connect her to resources on campus that gave her a space to meet other students with a similarly shared experience.

Mentorability

Lenny was open to her Peer Mentor's suggestions and advice. She instantly knew her mentor was going to be a valuable resource to her first year at Texas State. More importantly, she described the importance of wanting to participate and contribute to making the relationship work:

> I understand that people have good intentions to help others, and I always take it from there, that there are good people in this world. Not everyone is evil or bad. But yeah, a friendship. Someone you can count on. They give off a sense of like they care. They want you to succeed and then you want them to succeed, too.

The partnership and ability to demonstrate care in the partnership describe Lenny as someone who was very mentorable. She continued to reach out to her mentor, heed their advice, and contribute actively to the partnership. She reached a point in their relationship that she felt comfortable telling her mentor to smile and not to take his role so seriously. She inadvertently became more of a friend and saw her mentor as someone not in a position of authority. By our second interview, she was applying to become a Peer Mentor, became actively involved in student organizations, and found her place at the university.

Moon

Moon was a White woman from a mid-sized urban county. She was majoring in a Fine Arts degree and was enrolled in University Seminar during the fall 2019 semester. She was outgoing, dedicated to her academics, and loves Texas State.

Description of Mentoring

For her, mentoring was a really good experience because of having an upperclassman help her through anything during her first year. Initially, she was excited about the relationship and yet, at the same time, described the idea of mentoring as something she did not know she would need or use as much as she did. Mentoring to her:

> [Meant] having someone that I can rely on while I'm going through this new experience of getting through my first year of college. It meant having someone that, like, even though I could just talk to as a friend, like even if everything's going okay and like we've covered any topics that needed to be, we could just go on talking as if we were, like, best friends. Um, and it was just nice to have that time to talk to someone.

Mentoring solidified her decision to attend and continue at Texas State. Through their conversations, her mentor described why she chose Texas State, and that made Moon feel confident she had made a good decision and was going to enjoy her time in college. Mentoring was a big part of her first year on campus and reinforced her decision to attend the university.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Regardless if Moon was struggling or enjoying her time at Texas State, her relationship was very friendly. She described her mentor as someone who became a "best friend" who she could study with and confide in. Their interactions evolved, and she began seeing both their roles as accountability partners for their academics. When asked how they engaged in the partnership, Moon explained it as:

> The friendship thing for sure. And then I also feel like I've gotten someone that I can just study with because they started this semester with two new hours of study sessions every week. And I went to that yesterday, and that was really nice….It was nice to get together, it's not like you're studying with your best friend, where you get distracted and laugh or mess around…; they are your friends, but you know that you can all just focus on studying and you're all there. Get, get your stuff done and still have a good time.

Each time they interacted, she felt she contributed to the relationship. This included going to her study sessions even if she did not have to study.

Mentorability

Moon described how much she learned from her mentor about the school and herself. She was receptive to her mentor's feedback and felt she equally contributed to the relationship. In describing the relationship, Moon shared that:

> I sat down with my peer mentor…, and being the mentee, I really felt like I received a lot of guidance and information that really helped me and like guidance that was geared and directed towards all the things that I needed and was going through. In anything that I had questions on. Even after the overall, broader topics of just like, "Oh, how is school going?" It was also, how was this specific class that you're taking going as like one of the struggles.

The confidence level and comfortability to trust her mentor on academic difficulties demonstrated Moon's level of mentorability. Her willingness to be vulnerable and open with her mentor about many of the challenges she was experiencing showed the level of trust in the mentoring relationship that developed throughout the year.

Oz

Oz was majoring in Natural Science and was from a mid-sized urban county. She identified as being an Asian woman and a first-generation college student. Her experiences during her first year were impacted by her mentor who helped her as she experienced being a minority on the campus, something she described as unexpected when she chose Texas State. Despite appearing as outgoing, she self-described herself as being shy and enjoying one-on-one conversations more than being in group settings.

Description of Mentoring

Oz attributed getting out of her shell to her mentor, who was outgoing. The required meetings allowed her to open up to her mentor. She described mentoring as an equal relationship, like a sibling you are comfortable talking to about your problems and vice-versa. As she shared:

> I'm a freshman so I don't really know what's going on. Um, and everything is new. You know, college isn't really like high school, so having a mentor really helps you get off on the right foot. Um, I knew, I didn't understand, I didn't have a grasp of what college was like, so it was nice to have someone who is, who has been in college for a really long time to be able to help me.

It was important for Oz to start her college career off right, and very early on realized it wasn't going to be like high school anymore. However, her mentor was someone that could help her grasp college life sooner, and their experience was an important element of the mentoring relationship.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Oz described her mentor as a resource, a listening ear, and a guiding path forward through her experiences. These qualities were very important in helping her find an identity and connections to the campus community:

> So, at the first semester I was kinda like, we had this vegan rant, cause I'm vegan. So, um, we were just talking about it, and then we all talked about politics or whatever. But she introduced me to the animal rights club, and I really wanted to join a vegan club, and I didn't know Texas State had a club or anything like that. And she actually had a friend who was vegan in the animal rights club, and she gave me that connection. Which has allowed me to join a group that right now I'm in, and I really enjoy being in, and I'm so glad she introduced that to me.

Her mentor not only connected her to student organizations, but to people of similar interests. She helped build her network, and building this network opened her up to others. Oz and her mentor also shared experiences in housing and residential life. They both applied to be Resident Assistants, and this helped her develop a closer bond with her mentor, and the subject of being an RA was a consistent conversation topic throughout their mentoring relationship.

Mentorability

Early on Oz knew the relationship was mutual. She knew she needed to contribute to the relationship, and not just passively take advice and suggestions from her mentor. She felt her unique personality contributed to her relationship and she was able to teach her mentor how to work with different people like herself. She also described the relationship as a two-way street. Oz shared the following:

> I would say, um, any relationship has like give and take. A [mentee] shouldn't be just you talking. So, and from my experience, you know, when my peer mentor would ask me about my problems, you know, I obviously would rant and everything, but I would also ask, ask about her day. And I think that's really important to have, because that establishes a relationship, and if you have a relationship established, it's easier for both parties to share and relate to one another.

During their meetings, Oz would ask her mentor how she was doing and also use that to ease into the conversation during their meetings. She felt she contributed to the relationship by listening to her mentor's concerns more than she liked talking about herself and her experiences.

Ron

Ron was a first-generation college student from a rural county. He identified as Hispanic and is majoring in Natural Sciences. He was able to articulate his relationship with his mentor as a thoughtful relationship that continued to develop into a friendship after he was enrolled in US 1100 during the fall 2019 semester.

Description of Mentoring

Mentoring to Ron was a safe space to talk about his concerns and his initial feeling of being alone on a big campus. He eventually met lots of friends on campus but his relationship with his mentor was sacred. Ron shared that:

> I feel like I'm safe with someone. I could really discuss how I really feel about school, how I really feel about the faculty, some opinions I have about some issues we have at the school and other small things. But I just feel like it's really comfortable.

His mentor was someone that knew where he was coming from, so it was easier for him to discuss his progress, setbacks, and overall, his first year each time they met. The idea of an "entrusted friend" defined his mentoring relationship, and the comfort level continued to fuel the relationship.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Ron's Peer Mentor created a comfortable environment built on trust. He described his role as an attention seeker and researcher. He was an attention seeker by requesting information from his mentor and a researcher to find out some of the answers he did not know and share with his mentor. These qualities helped him contribute to building a more profound relationship with his mentor. These qualities also led to Ron listening and trusting his mentor. He described his initial thought as:

> I noticed that the first time I met with her, I didn't really take it seriously, and I didn't take any of the advice she gave me about schoolwork. And I saw like one of my classes

> dropped by two, three points. So, the second time I asked it like, "Well, can you repeat what you said the first time?" And I took it into consideration instead of just thinking like, "Oh, it's just someone else." And that really helped me understand what Texas State is really about, and it kind of boosted my grade by four or five points.

At first their relationship struggled because he did not see the value and importance of the relationship. It eventually led to him understanding that his mentor was someone he could count on for support and encouragement and it went beyond the surface level. His mentor really wanted him to [succeed.

Mentorability

Once Ron understood his role as a mentee, he placed more value in what his mentor could offer. If he wasn't going to take it seriously, then it was going to be a waste of time for the mentor that could actually be teaching someone that wanted to be in the program. This realization also allowed him to reciprocate the caring nature she embodied and made him realize he could also be a friend to her. As he shared:

> I like helping her emotionally. Cause I remember one day she was really, really distraught. Like, she was really hurt about something in a relationship. So, I kind of was there to help her. Like, you would notice like, some visible cues like chills were jittery, and she didn't want to make eye contact as you would think a professional would. I asked her is everything okay? Which she then proceeded to say, like, "Oh me and my partner for like two years didn't end off on a good note." So, then I told her, like, "Oh, it's okay. Like, things happen." And then I really didn't know how to relate to the situation, so I decided to give her an experience of mine with family members that I had that was similar to it. Then she felt really good about that, and she appreciated what I did for her.

Not only was he there to help her during a difficult situation by listening to her, but he also felt he contributed to the relationship by talking about his culture and places he enjoyed eating. He felt he taught her new things she wouldn't have known or learned if it wasn't for his engagement in the partnership.

Sarah

Sarah was a White, woman, Fine Arts major from a large urban county. Her mentoring experience only lasted during her fall semester, but she had a strong relationship with her mentor during the short few months. When her mentor graduated fall 2019, she was assigned a new peer mentor, and at the time of the first interview had not connected with her new peer mentor. By the second interview, she had reached out to her new peer mentor for assistance with remote learning.

Description of Mentoring

Sarah described her mentor as a life support, as someone she could talk to about things she couldn't share with others and who allowed her to feel comfortable in the process. Her description of mentoring included:

> Having a person with a little bit more knowledge on certain topics or things and their experiences, and helping people who have not yet experienced those things kind of, um, feel more comfortable, in like a transition or something like that… especially as like a first year student, you know, I'm surrounded by, you know, whole bunch of other freshmen who probably have similar concerns or questions that I do. And I feel like having someone who has had those experiences and who, like, knows the campus, and I feel like that's a good source that I could go to.

For Sarah, mentoring was an important contribution to not only her first year but other first-year students as well.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Sarah connected with her peer mentor and felt comfortable asking questions about getting more involved, applying to the Honors College, and trying to make the most out of her college experience. As Sarah described:

> I told you it was very personal. So I was able to, you know, not only talk about myself, but understand, um, you know, kind of her experiences that she's gone through and you know, what her day to day looks like and that sort of thing. You know, some of our

> personal things in our lives, um, and just getting a better understanding of each other, like as a person. I think that's also helped.

Her first mentor was someone she could really trust and felt comfortable sharing personal experiences with. She was receptive to feedback and to learning from her peer mentor and applying the advice was shared with her. Her mentor was also a friendly face she felt comfortable sharing her struggles and challenges with.

Mentorability

Sarah was willing to be vulnerable and ask for help. She knew it was the quickest way to get answers and avoid any unnecessary stress. As she shared:

> I think the first step is just to kind of ask for help. Um, it may be hard to, but at the same time, like that person also just wants to help you out. And, so I think just being able to like just kind of, you know, ask the initial question or something to, um, like, you know, step into that question can also, can definitely help.

Sarah also shared the importance of giving feedback and being relatable as an important part of her contributions to the mentoring relationship.

Steve

Steve was a second semester first-year student who was from a large urban county. He was a Liberal Arts major, first-generation student, and identified as being a White man. He focused a great deal on situational mentoring, was thoughtful in his responses, and was very inquisitive of the process of mentorship.

Description of Mentoring

A mentoring relationship to him was focused on helping mentees with the unspoken rules of college and influencing the small things. Mentoring for him was very surface level and he described it as just something he had to do. Mentoring for him was:

> Just someone who you meet with a couple of times a semester and they answer questions you have. Since it's a peer mentor, they can sort of fill you in on the unspoken social

> rules, social norms, social conventions of the school that, you know, a professor, or a welcome letter, you know, wouldn't otherwise provide. They might be able to provide more in-depth knowledge of things of certain offices, certain resources, you know, provide personal experience to help.

While he described the importance of what a mentoring relationship could offer, he also described that his role was "to follow or adhere to the guidance or suggestions or whatever you want to call it, uh, placed upon you by the mentor," and was limited on anything he felt he could contribute.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Steve found his mentor a resource and his advocate. His mentoring relationship was described as suggestions of all the "small things that make a big difference." During the semester he accumulated many parking tickets and shared the experience with his Peer Mentor about the experience:

> So here are all your tickets. We're not going to fix your license plate until you pay those. And, yeah, it wasn't going to fix my license plate until I paid them. But of course, I was like, "Eh, like $800." [The mentor] was saying that's absolutely ridiculous. She's like, "I'm going to my supervisor." She told me to go to the Dean of Students, which wasn't any help. She was like, "I'm going to go to my supervisor. This is absolutely ridiculous." She was wanting to go to bat for me, so that I did appreciate it.

This particular instance showed Steve that his mentor had his best interest in mind and wanted to remove as many barriers to his success. His mentor also suggested helpful places to study, locations to grab a quick bite to eat, and resources to go to during his first year.

Mentorability

Steve did listen to the advice of his mentor on several different occasions, but most of the relationship was one-way transactional. He only sought out help when he needed an answer to a question, and he felt his mentoring experience was exclusively to help his mentor fulfill a job responsibility, as he was filling an academic requirement. As he shared:

> I felt like I was fulfilling an academic requirement, and I don't know if they get paid or what. But, the way I saw it, was I was, um, fulfilling my academic requirement and in turn fulfilling theirs. But you know, allowing them to meet their duties as a peer mentor. Yeah.

This sentiment was a recurring perception of the mentoring relationship for Steve. He understood you have to play a role in the relationship because a mentor can't be a mentor without a mentee, but the relationship was average, and he had no interest in more than a surface level commitment.

Yair

Yair identified as a Hispanic man with ties to Cuba and lives in a large urban county. He was a Fine Arts major, a first-generation college student, and first-generation American. He was very descriptive in his comments and very appreciative of his mentor, recognizing early on how much he could benefit and contribute to the mentoring relationship.

Description of Mentoring

Constructing a new environment was a reason Yair found the value of a mentoring relationship. His mentor helped him recognize high school was a very structured environment, and college was very different. He was able to construct a new meaning of his engagement with an upperclassman. Yair drew from former developmental relationships to describe how he engaged in a mentoring relationship. As he shared, "[Mentoring] was more like a coaching thing, you know, like they're not there to solve your problems, but when somebody mentors you, they're just like putting the cells in the right direction." The cells he described were aspects of his life he needed to succeed during his first year. He described his mentor helping him refocus his efforts and find balance. For instance, he needed to prioritize academics but understood how playing X-Box was his escape and his avenue for de-stressing. He needed to find a balance

between things he could get consumed by and using them as positive motivators to complete his work. Mentoring was a connection to how to be successful during his first year.

Relationship with the Peer Mentor

Yair's relationship with his Peer Mentor was playful and direct. They were able to find a balance between being friends and moving forward together in the partnership with constructive criticism and necessary advice. Their relationship consisted of academic, social, and life discussions. Yair shared that:

> It's my first year; I'm doing bad in this aspect of school. "How would you tackle it?" And she gave me her personal input…, or I'm supposed to be getting an apartment next year. I have no idea what, how, what to even do about that. And she was like, "I remember when I was confused," but then she gave me a list of like, "Hey, just go to these resources, talk to these people, and maybe like you'll get more clarity and what exactly you're trying to do." Yeah, I think that's pretty, like, I think it's pretty, beneficial. Cause if it was like some random, like 40-year-old person, they're like, "Hey man, how was your first year going?" I'd be like, "Uh, like I don't even know how to talk to them cause like they're not directly in my shoes," you know, like the [mentor] was, she was like, she was a student and I'm a student. So that relationship was like, we at least had something in common that way.

Yair was more likely to benefit from seeking the advice of a peer versus a faculty/staff member on campus. He wanted help from someone who knew exactly what he was going through and trusted their recent experiences and appreciated their input in helping him navigate novel and difficult decisions he was making for the first time.

Mentorability

Yair understood the importance of communication and willingness as characteristics of a mentee, that would make the mentoring relationship thrive. He was therefore willing to voice his concerns and listen to the advice his mentor gave him. He also understood that the shift in responses from his mentor varied from playful to serious. This understanding was evident by his description of how adaptable his mentor was to each situation:

> I mean like she's always going to be a mentor, but her responses will always vary on what I have to say or ask and the attitude that she displays when I ask a question, or when I highlight sorrows and the confusion of like, what's happening. You know, she depends on her reaction of how to deal with it or how to give me sound advice from her perspective. But yeah, at the same time, like when it comes to anything, anyone that can help you or anything that can influence you, it's all about what you say personally, you know? She's not going to know that I have X going on in my life, and she doesn't know how to respond to it. She doesn't know what it is, you know? So that all depends on the output of like, what you're actually saying as a mentee.

Yair's mentor's reaction depended on what he provided both on context and severity. If it was something crucial, her intensity and reaction would adapt to his need. At the same time, he provided humor and lightness in their relationship, and he felt it was something he could contribute to the relationship. He understood what being mentorable was and wanted to take full advantage of the partnership. It brought a level of security to his first year.

Summary

The 17 participants were a diverse set of students who engaged with their mentors and described their experiences in the partnership. Six of the 17 participants were unable to be reached for the second interview but were still included in the analysis and study. After data collection and analysis, there were several key findings that emerged and answered the research questions for this study. The next chapter discusses those findings.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter discusses key findings from the research study on how first-year students describe their experiences as a mentee in a formal mentoring program. The key findings were constructed from participant interviews and crafted to show how they found meaning through mentoring as a process. The findings are presented in three sections in chronological order and describe specific moments through the mentoring process. The first section provides themes on how participants' described the beginning stages of the mentoring partnership. The second section describes how students navigate and interact during their mentoring relationship. The third section shares how students describe their understanding of how they contribute to the partnership.

Section I: How Do Student Mentees Describe Their Expectations at the Beginning of the Formal Peer Mentoring Partnership?

The first research question focuses on the experiences of mentees at the beginning stages of a formal mentoring program. More specifically, it addresses how students describe finding out about their mentoring partnership, their initial reaction, and how they engaged in the mentoring partnership for the first time. I used Astin's (1993) I-E-O model as a theoretical framework to capture a specific point in a student's mentoring partnership and how the mentee described their expectations at the beginning of the formal peer mentoring partnership.

Finding 1: Mentees Are Unclear About Mentoring and How to Engage in the Partnership

Initial Apprehension

For first-year students at Texas State University, mentoring was now a part of their University Seminar class requirement. Mentees were first notified about their mentor during New Student Orientation and engaged with them during Bobcat Preview, a required extended

new student program. Students were required to meet and engage in a mentoring partnership twice during their fall semester. Mentees had to shift mindsets to view peer mentoring as value-added rather than just another thing to do. Most of the participants in the study were at first hesitant to engage in the partnership. As Oz first described:

> I didn't really expect much of it, you know, I was just like, "Oh, I'm in another class cause like, um, making [meetings] with your peer mentor was mandatory." And I was like, "Okay, it's just something that I have to do anyways." So that was just kind of an initial thing like, "Oh, I'll just do it because I'd have to do it kinda thing."

The participants also described how they believed the relationship was going to be a one-way, transactional relationship. Mentees were to participate in the relationship by listening and adhering to the advice of the mentor throughout the process. This common initial reaction of mentees, seeing peer-mentoring as one-way, was echoed in Ron's words:

> It wasn't going to be as successful as I thought it would. It was just going to be like, "you'd tell me what to do and I should follow." I didn't really think there was going to be much engagement in it.

Not knowing how to engage in the partnership was a concern for many. The forced relationship between peers was an unknown and uncharted ground for students engaging in the partnership for the first time. Lenny questioned her own engagement in the partnership: "At first I thought it was like, why? Like do I really need one? Like am I being forced for this?" Others had concerns about being monitored and closely watched as they were adjusting to a level of freedom they had not experienced yet. For instance, Yair's response describes his initial reluctance in the partnership: "I was like, 'Uh, dude, like are they just going to check up on me? How bad I'm doing in class?' Like, you know what I mean?" When most participants first heard they were going to be assigned a peer mentor, they felt apprehension and apathy toward the relationship due to the ambiguous information they received regarding the purpose of the partnership.

Unclear Instructions

Most participants continued to express concern for not knowing how to engage and what to do when they finally met with their peer mentor. They understood that this engagement with a peer mentor was a requirement but did not know how to interact and what the experience was going to be like. As Steve stated:

> I don't think I was dreading the idea of being mentored. I think I was just like, "Okay, I have to go talk with this person who I've never met for half an hour, and I have no idea what we're going to talk about, and I have no idea what this is supposed to be." I had also been in Jones maybe like twice since then. So, it was sort of the social anxiety of looking like a lost idiot. So, I wouldn't say I was more dreading the mentoring part of it. I was more dreading the idea of having to sit down and talk to someone, and I don't know what they're going to be like….What am I going to talk about with the person for 30 minutes? Cause I know they're required to do conversations, so I don't want to make it miserable for them.

Many of the participants shared concerns similar to those experienced when meeting anyone for the first time. As Camila described it, she was nervous because "you sit in front of a person and wonder who they will be?" The shared feeling of uncertainty and fear was echoed among many, including Ron who shared that:

> At first I wasn't really comfortable with the whole peer mentorship just because I didn't, I didn't know the person, and I didn't really think they would understand where I was coming from because they did come from a bigger school, and they came from a different part of Texas. So, I felt like we weren't really gonna make a connection at all. But after like the 15-minute mark, we started getting more and more in-depth, and we really became closer and closer so that I really became more adjusted to the peer mentor as time progressed.

Concerns about not being compatible or finding similar interests were a common recurring topic among mentees discussing the first meeting with their mentor. Only two participants were commuter students, and the others lived on campus with varied backgrounds and experiences. For many students it was critical for them to connect in a way that they felt comfortable and safe. Initial hesitation in the meetings also brought up many barriers that could prevent mentees from meeting with their mentor. These barriers included lack of interest, time constraints, unsolicited

advice, and imposed resources. Adam Wallace's initial reaction when he first heard he was going to have a mentor was, "Oh man, I don't think I'm going to be able to go to the meetings. I don't know, my time schedule, you know, just getting into college and not knowing everything I guess." Oz also agreed, sharing her concerns about time:

> [My mentor] emailed us at the beginning of this semester saying, like, "Oh, you need to set a meeting with me." But like, I don't know, I'm really busy all the time, so I'm not sure. I'll definitely look into it cause I've just been really like, going around hectically. I'm busy like every single day.

One interesting comment came from Lenny regarding how she perceived her peers and their mentoring relationship. When asked about the role of the mentor, Lenny remarked:

> I think as a mentee, [the Mentor] shouldn't be very pushy. "Do your bookings, do your bookings." It's like, "We heard you the first time," but like, don't be very pushy about it, cause there's, like, there are students who don't want that type of interaction so that they could be very, like, "Oh, I'm just gonna do it cause I have to." It feels like there's just some others who just don't want to do it for some reason cause they either say, "I don't have anything to talk about. I don't see the point of it." So, I feel there are very different types of mentees who want this and who don't want it. It was like you can't force a relationship if you're not - if one person doesn't want it. Like, you can't force anything in this world.

Lenny's message about a forced relationship with her mentor was not echoed by other participants in this study; however, the possibility of having different types of mentee input and engagement was a poignant finding in the development of the relationship.

Developing Interest

While there were some initial hesitations and challenges to engaging with their mentor, some participants saw the potential relationship as being both a positive and negative experience. JB felt some initial concerns but then realized how beneficial having an upperclassman at her disposal could be. As JB describes it:

> It was more of an obligation at first, you know, like why, cause we have so many counselors here but I was just like, "Uh, like cool." It's almost like both sides. Cause then

> I was excited cause I'm like, "Oh my gosh, just college and freshman I get to meet somebody older who has done it." So, it was like both.

The idea of an upperclassman who was assigned and available to assist them transition to the university was also appealing to several participants, such as the case of Moon who shared:

> When I first found that out, I was kind of like, "This is great cause," I didn't realize I needed one, but having the [University Seminar] class and knowing that I would have someone that I could meet with one-on-one who wasn't just a teacher, but actual student who I could relate to a little more to help me. It was really nice knowing that I had that.

After the initial meeting participants' mindset began shifting from uncertainty to appreciation, as they described a very different understanding of the relationship. Most first-year students experience a transitional time period when they adapt to new and challenging environments. Such was also the case with first-year students adapting to their mentor-mentee relationship. Eventually, participants began to see the value of their mentor.

Finding 2: Mentees Learn Early How Valuable Their Mentor is to Their Success

Value-Added

Most participants reported seeing the partnership as a value-added contribution to their experiences as a first-year student. Once mentees moved past the initial concern and nerves, they looked at the partnership as something that could enhance their first year and provide an avenue of support and guidance. As Moon describes it:

> She was still like someone who was an equal, like there's someone I can relate to. So, I went from being kind of like nervous to like, "Okay," like this is just going to be like a formal meeting. I feel like even if you don't think you could benefit with anything, you ultimately do. When you go to the required mentor meetings. You do realize that it is nice because you've made a new friend and you benefit from making a new friend. You benefit from getting to talk, even if it's not talking about your struggles, just talking about how good of a time you're having at school can really be helpful. And then also hearing back from a mentor about how they feel about the school and feeling like, okay, "I made a good choice. I'm in a good place at this school, and it's going to be a good time."

Lenny's comments also reflected the idea of having an upperclassman who could contribute to her experience. She added that:

> At the end it's like, you have to think about the positive side. It's like, it can be very beneficial and not think of it as like, "Oh yeah, they're forcing me to have one." But it's a cool thing. Like not everyone gets to have one. I got chosen to have one. So, at first, I was like a negative, like "Oh, I'm not ready to talk to somebody." I'm a really introvert, shy, but I looked at the silver lining and was like, "This is a great choice." I feel like I'm more comfortable now. More comfortable. There's always that stigma of people were like, "Oh, like I don't like my peer mentor." But I'm always like, "Well, are you open enough as they are open to them and say it's a very mutual thing. It's like if you're going to be there very standoffish, yes, you're going to feel that way," But like for me, I was like, "I was very open, the idea, I was like, great, I love mentors. I love this."

Many echoed both Moon's and Lenny's responses on how their initial hesitation transformed into a positive experience for them. For instance, Ron shared his experiences with his mentor during their first two meetings:

> We had to talk about what she was given because it was the class we were obligated to take. But after that, when I met with her this year, we really got to know each other more on a student-to-student basis. We got to talk about the school and other stuff we are participating in and how it's going for us. So, it's really like a friend instead of just looking at them as a mentor.

The friendship in the partnership also gave mentees more confidence in their transition to Texas State. As Moon shared, she was less afraid and more confident to make new friends after their first meeting. As she shared:

> I was kind of nervous going into it. Like, "I don't know what to expect coming out of this meeting. Like what's going to go, like, what's happening." But after just the basic questions of just checking up on how I was doing during my first semester with the transition. We just started talking about friend things, like, just about our hobbies and personalities and things that we're interested in. And it just made me feel a lot better. Uh, having a friend.

Once mentees shifted their mindset from apprehension to appreciating and learning how valuable their mentor was, mentees began to invest more in the partnership.

Establishing a Strong Foundation

Most mentees felt more comfortable once a mentor shared what their role and responsibility was in the partnership and set clear expectations during their first meeting. The awkward silence was dissolved once the mentee understood that the mentor was there to help them. As Yair described:

> That's one thing I really appreciated. You don't, you don't really have to break the ice with a person like that cause it would be really awkward. She told me straight off the bat, "Hey, I'm here to help you. It can be a big way or small way, but just know that you have me as a resource." And I thought that was pretty cool in a relationship. I know this person isn't just here to take up an hour of my day. Like there's something to look forward to. It's just a relationship that I liked.

When participants were asked what the first experience was like, a few participants described their mentor following a suggested script of questions and/or following a rubric. As Ron explained how his mentor went beyond the pre-established questions: "It was just the questions she would ask from a rubric, but once we finished those questions and she really asked questions that she wanted to know about me, that's where the conversation really started to go off." Jake made similar comments when he shared that "[he] connected with [his mentor] more or less after the first meeting cause there was obviously some shyness between one another and just trying to fit in. But after the first meeting, it got a lot better, and we communicated more." Subsequently, Steve also described a similar situation. He anticipated there being awkwardness between him and his mentor but was pleasantly surprised by the outcome: "There's going to be, I don't want to call it standoffishness, but a little bit of apprehensiveness on either side. But like once we just started talking like it was just a normal conversation." Each of these participants seemed to prefer natural conversations versus answering prewritten questions. These findings highlight the importance of the first meeting and how that set the tone of the relationship.

Meanwhile, Lala found commonality instantaneously between him and his mentor, and that made him feel more relaxed in the partnership. The shared major and interest made him feel

more connected to his mentor right away, as he had yet to find that in his residence hall or in his classes. As Lala describes:

> We met at LBJ, and honestly it was chill. We just chatted for half an hour. Like, she asked me how I was adjusting to the campus. I was just going to dorm life and everything was going okay. And then we got to bond over how we're both really into chemistry and how our majors are actually fairly similar. And so I'll be learning from that aspect because she's already taken classes I will be taking or I'm taking right now, and that's very exciting because none of my friends in my dorm can really bond with me like that. They're all like computer science majors or nursing majors.

Lala and his mentor shared many things in common, and he was fortunate to have her in dual roles both as his peer mentor and lab assistant, increasing the frequency of meetings and his investment in the partnership.

The first meeting also provided an opportunity for participants to find a first friend on a campus to help with the uncertainty and unfamiliarity of a college campus. As Oz describes it, "After my first meeting I was like, 'Okay, like I kinda like it now.' Because in the beginning of my freshman year, I didn't have any friends. So, like just starting off with someone I kind of already knew and who knew me. It was nice to have." Camilla also shared a similar sentiment that after the first meeting she felt comfortable asking for help and felt more informed about her resources when the message came from a peer. Once mentees understood that the mentor was there to help them, usually after their first meeting, the relationship shifted, and the mentees saw mentors as a lifeline to their success.

Lifeline to Success

Most participants felt peer-mentoring provided added value because it helped them succeed. After establishing a strong foundation, mentors provided a lifeline for mentees to become academically successful, connect to campus events or resources, and assist in their social transition to campus.

Academically. A few participants describe how their mentor helped them understand the academic rigor of college courses and how normal and important it was to seek help from additional resources. As Jake shared:

> I was having, uh, trouble in classes and I had, uh, we met up with each other, and we're talking about it, and I didn't know what to do. I was stuck in a situation where grades were getting out of what I didn't like or getting into an area where I didn't like them, and I didn't know what to do. So, she recommended places to go to help him improve my grades, and it really helped me.

Participants were able to see benefits from taking their mentors' academic advice and appeared to contribute to the trust and confidence they had in listening and adhering to their mentor.

Connecting to Campus. Many participants described their mentor as someone who connected students to on-campus and community events, which they found valuable. Mentors also became an accountability partner to help ensure that students were successful in the University Seminar class as well as their own courses. As Abdul shares:

> She informs us about PACE events that are happening and just any extra like concerts or like music that is happening.in the performing arts centers. She sends a friendly email every week just saying like, "I hope you're staying on top of your grades, and if not just come talk to me."

For Yair, his mentor helped him with time management and finding resources on campus. He quickly learned how different college was from high school and how his mentor could help him get from point A to point B more efficiently. When asked how his first few weeks of the semester went, he articulated the following:

> Your first year is more of a transitional period. I was in high school for so many years, and the public education system has taught me that I got to go to these eight periods every single day, five days a week. And it was pretty easy. You know, you show up, and that's it. But once you get here, it's like there's so many different things going on, and since it's more on you to, you know, get from point A to point B, you need more direction and just finding resources to begin with even if you don't know where to look for. It was pretty cool having a mentor, not necessarily someone just to like counsel me or like to make me feel like a baby or anything like that. But it was pretty good how she already had resources and personal experiences for somebody in my shoes, and that really

> did help me. This is only my second semester, and I'm not even halfway done, but like having somebody just to check up on it was pretty like I liked it a lot personally. The fact that we had to like to check in with her and she gave a calendar of when we're supposed to meet up with her. Yeah. Even though it would vary from month-to-month and my problems, it would be like, "Were, what did these buildings mean? And/or, like, Oh, well what's financial aid? What the hell is that?" And then she just, she just gave me advice and, like, "Hey, if you want to focus in school, learn to prioritize this instead of this." And that's when I actually felt like a mentee cause I was like, "Hey I should be taking, like notes, you know, like college is real," and I didn't expect that.

Yair's explanation highlights how versatile his mentor was in providing guidance and support in his transition and learning. In addition, Brielle discussed the importance of having her mentor help her because she was an out-of-state student. As she describes:

> I'm an out of state student and I didn't know anybody here at all…; my mentor was an out of state student as well. She was able to relate to me in a way that not everybody can. And in fact, she's specifically there to help me kind of grow and get acquainted with the school.

As an out-of-state student, Brielle was keen to gravitating to her mentor because of their shared identity. This benefited the relationship and allowed her to establish trust early. Not only was the peer mentor connecting students to resources and events on campus, mentors also served as a resource themselves. Mentors connected with students and provided emotional support and guidance early on in the partnership.

Belonging. For Lenny, the peer mentor helped build her confidence and showed her she belonged here. She became comfortable speaking in class, sharing her ideas, and began to understand the purpose of higher education. As Lenny shares:

> The mentor really showed me that I could be confident and show like, I belonged here and to show I am as smart as everybody is. Like, "I can do it too." To be more confident, to be more open in class and to spread my ideas because I used to say, I still am very shy, but I'm starting now to open up more in discussion and to share my opinions and ideas because that's what my mentor taught me is; just be open….Thinking like a first gen student and then a Latina as well, I think it's hard cause you walk in and you see, like, many people like, like, like, White people and like, more money than you. And for me it was a shock cause, I was not used to this. I'm used to a classroom feeling with people who look like me, like, speaking Spanish and stuff like that, and being here, people kind

> of give you the look like, "Why are you here?"...I do feel like I belong here. It was my mentor giving me that suggestion. You may feel uncomfortable, but there's these, like, comfortable spaces where you'll feel like you belong.

Lenny struggled at the very beginning of her transition to Texas State and described her mentor as one of the reasons she began to break out of her shell and learn more about herself and the university. Several participants also described their peer mentor as someone who helped them create a sense of belonging. For Lenny, that newfound sense was helping her find a community she identified with and a space where she could share her concerns with someone during their initial meeting. Similarly, Ron shared how important it was to confide in his mentor and how it provided a sense of security during his transition. If anything were to happen, Ron knew he could share his struggles with his mentor and ask for guidance, something he wasn't able to do with other PACE Success Team members. As Ron shares:

> [Mentors] help boost self-esteem. [First-year students] think they won't make it in college. They think they're alone….A lot of people just come to slack off and do what they want because they don't have anybody watching over them. A sense of security where something was to happen on campus. You can't just tell anybody. But with your peer mentor, everything's confidential.

Similarly, Oz found her mentor to be someone she could get comfortable with and share some of her thoughts of feeling alone and being isolated. The first few weeks of the semester was better once she realized her mentor was there to help her start her semester strong. As she describes:

> You get knowledge, like, where you are, you also get comfortable, you get a relationship' basically you're in a new role/place, you know, people. Um, yeah, you were forced into the relationship, but it really just does set you off on the right foot. And I think, I think every freshman could relate, but there are times where you do feel alone, like you can't, you don't really know what's going on. So yeah, there's a lot of benefits.

Transitioning to campus can be very overwhelming for many students. Having someone to sort through all of the information became helpful for many. Many of the participants shared how challenging it was to make friends, figure out what organizations to join, and how to manage

their time. For instance, Oz described how important it was for her to connect with a mentor to sift through some of her first few weeks of the semester. Oz shares that:

> It can be really overwhelming because there's so many different personalities everywhere. And I think, when you're first into that situation of being a mentee, like, everyone's coming at you, like, during new student orientation and around Bobcat week. Everyone is coming at you, like, "Hey, like have you seen this? Join our club." It can be really overwhelming. You don't know what's going on. There's so much going on. So you're like, "What do I do first?" I think because everyone's just coming at you with all this information, you just kinda have to, like sit there and you're like, "Okay, what do I know? What do I not know?" And just like figure it out just by sitting there and thinking through what just happened.

When mentees opened up about their personal experiences with the mentor, they were able to relate to the mentor and began to build a relationship. Mentors listened to the concerns of their mentees and adjusted responses to meet their unique and varied needs. As mentors became a valued lifeline to success, the mentoring relationship continued to grow and develop. Mentoring became a process with various points of progression and growth. The early stages of mentoring relationships are critical for a mentee to understand the mentor's role, establish a strong relationship with the mentor, and see the mentor as a valuable resource.

Summary of Findings from Section I

Participants in the study shared their experiences at the beginning of the formal relationship. One of the shared experiences of the participants was their initial apprehension and hesitation at the idea of meeting with someone they did not know. Although only a few participants described that being assigned a peer mentor piqued their interest, the consensus was that they were unclear about the partnership and lacked a clear understanding of their role as a mentee. In summary, findings from section one reinforces the idea of mentoring as a process and a continued developmental relationship. In answering RQ 1, participants described initial hesitation and apprehension followed by understanding and accepting that their mentor was

assigned to help them be successful. After participants understood the purpose of their peer mentor, they saw that person as value-added and a lifeline to their success. The next section continues discussing how mentees engaged and participated in the formal mentoring partnership.

Section II: How Do Student Mentees Describe Their Lived Experiences in the Formal Peer Mentoring Partnership?

This section addresses the second research question and describes mentees' lived experiences in the formal peer mentoring partnership. Findings from this question were framed through a social capital lens and an ability for mentees to access their mentor's human capital (Lin, 2001). The exchange and partnership of mentoring relationships are impacted by the information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcements provided by the mentor. Participants of the study described the various exchanges in how they engaged in the mentorship.

There was a range of types of exchanges that occurred between each participant and their mentor. These exchanges occurred throughout the participants' first year and contributed to their success as students by helping them navigate institutional procedures and policies. The following findings contribute to the most salient shared meaning among participants.

Finding 1: Mentees as Information Seekers

All participants in the study discussed how they received several different types of information from their mentors that shaped their experiences as first-year students. Information exchanged included how to connect to resources, engage in collaborative conversations, and view their mentor as a resource. For many, the information shared helped participants do better academically and connected them to campus and allowed them to get acquainted with their peer mentor. This resource saved participants time and allowed them to focus on other aspects of their lives.

Mentors as the Resource

Accessing human capital allowed participants to connect with someone who provided immediate assistance. For many of the participants, this was vital to their ability to be successful. As Leaf describes:

> I just come to my mentor with any questions, be honest, not beating around the bush. If I'm lost and I really don't know anywhere to go to, I go to my mentor, and they will help me. They lead me in the direction that I need and give me advice.

Mentors became the first go-to-person to help participants navigate the campus; participants knew they could get from point A to point B more quickly with their mentors' help. In addition, like Yair, mentees referenced the importance of frequently asking questions:

> Like I would text her, I would ask her questions like every time I'd see [the mentor] around campus I'd be like, "Hello." And I asked her a question, and she was in our US 1100 class, and I would ask her questions in class like, "Hey, uh, can you help catch me up on this? Or what? Or what am I supposed to be doing?"

Yair, like many of the participants, saw his mentor as the starting point and represented a point that was shared by many of the participants. The mentor was described as being a starting point in connecting to many of the university resources, finding jobs, locating textbooks, and getting technology assistance. Being in a mentoring relationship also provided participants assistance with course work, regardless of the mentor's subject discipline. For instance, Camila shared that: "One of the things that we did was writing. I didn't know I could really write inspiring essays. [My mentor] helped me revise, get edited, and fix big mistakes." Assistance with course subjects was beyond the scope of the peer mentors' responsibility, but mentors often went beyond their job description and were versatile in their role as a resource. Mentees also felt that advice from their mentor positively impacted their academics. One participant explained that the information his mentor provided regarding academics was helpful once he took it seriously. As Ron describes it:

> I noticed that the first time I met with her I didn't really take it seriously and I didn't take any of the advice she gave me about schoolwork. And I saw one of my classes dropped by two, three points. So, the second time I asked like, "Well, can you repeat what you said the first time?" And I took it into consideration instead of just thinking like, "Oh, it's just someone else." That really helped me understand what Texas State is really about, and it kind of boosted my grade by four or five points.

After Ron realized his mentor was there to support him, he became more comfortable in trusting the peer mentor's advice and suggestions. He also describes his role as both an information seeker and researcher. Not only was he seeking advice, but he also needed to learn more about what his mentor was suggesting and apply it to his life. Knowing they had access to their mentor as human capital also helped alleviate stress for many. This included working on their time management skills, learning from their mentors' past mistakes, and how to get guidance. Sarah recalled a stressful situation where her peer mentor was her go-to person. As Sarah shares:

> If I had questions about anything. Um, like, especially during like this time when I asked my peer mentor some questions because I just, I was, I felt really stressed about the situation. And it just, it was nice to have that person to go to, to kind of give me that reassurance, and being like, "You know, we're in the same boat."

Mentees knew they were expected to reach out to their mentor or learned that very quickly. As Oz describes:

> [My mentor] was always very open to any questions and, especially I think, as first year's they kinda expect us to question everything. So it's been nice to just have a comfortable space where we're able to show our concerns and confusion, and I think they do a really good job of guiding us, which place to go for advice, like for PACE, you know, obviously for your schedule.

Oz, as well as many of the participants, expressed an understanding of their mentee role in asking the mentor questions. The mentor was the first individual many of the participants went to when they had questions and needed to confide in someone who had previously been in their shoes as novice first-year students and who they felt free from judgment.

Connecting to Resources

Participants collectively shared they knew the university offered many resources for them to be successful. At times, this was very overwhelming for participants. Participating in their mentoring relationship helped them with finding the right support for their individual needs. For instance, Yair shared how his mentor helped connect him to academic resources like SLAC and the Writing Center and shared the importance of utilizing the services. As he describes:

> I didn't even know [The Writing Center] exists. It's like they have glass windows and glass walls. I didn't, yeah, that helped me a lot. Like actually, [my mentor] sat down and she told me about Derrick Hall; they can help you with math homework. It's just, little stuff like that, and it really does go a long way because for the most part you do feel like it's like, "Oh damn, I actually have to do this. I can't just show up to class."

Mentors also connected them to non-academic resources like the counseling center and career counselors to help learn more about career options. As Brielle shared, her mentor helped connect her to a career counselor to help: "When I first came, I was undeclared. So definitely that helped." Finally, participating in a mentoring relationship connected students to the campus community and got them more involved in student organizations. As Sarah describes:

> [My mentor] just kinda helped me figure out ways that I could become more involved. And also, there were lots of questions I had about certain resources that I was considering using. For example, the counseling center. I had been debating about you know, using that resource, but I kinda didn't know how to go about it or how it really worked because I've heard from other friends at different universities, and it's, it's all different, for them. So, it was nice to get to kind of ask questions and or to direct me in a way that I could get the answers that I knew I wanted.

Mostly all participants alluded to their mentor as someone who connected them to services to help them be successful.

Peer Mentor Experiences as Tools

When mentees received information that included their mentors' experiences, mentees found value in not only learning more about their mentor but learning to avoid potential pitfalls and common mistakes their mentor had endured. Participants learned that listening to their

mentor's personal experiences was important in building a relationship with their mentor and also validated some of their own experiences they were having. As Leaf shares:

> The main benefits of any person in [a mentee] position is that you're always going to be able to take from their experiences and, like, try to implant it in your own. It's always gonna help you at least get on your own feet when you're trying to solve a problem that you have. And regardless of what the mentoring is for. Like, "Hey, I feel really bad or I'm stressed out at school," or "Hey, I have this amount of classes and work to do. I have no idea how to tackle it." Like, they're in a position where they have experience, and they know exactly what the hell is going on, and regardless… they're not going to obviously like go down and do your homework for you. They're going to tell you what to do, and the fact that they're doing that as always is going to immediately give you clarity.

Avoiding common mistakes was a way mentees utilized their mentors' past experiences. They wanted to understand how they could avoid some common first-year student mistakes. As Lala describes:

> Everyone needs someone to tell them what they did, how that worked out for them. If it was good, if it was bad, essentially like someone to be a lab rat for them and be like, "Oh yeah, I went to that teacher, he sucked, don't do it. Go to another one. I'm telling you right now you're dodging a bullet." And so there's a lot of benefits that come from that and that's sort of just what happens when there's a passage of time between two people when there's someone who's a year older or 10 years older because they have so much more experience. We want the new generation to grow, and we can have them grow by exceeding where we failed, by showing where we failed, and what we did wrong, and what caused that failure.

Adam Wallace corroborated this experience; he explained the importance of learning from his mentors' past experiences, including their mistakes helped him navigate the new space:

> The advice from their experiences at college can teach us what and what not to do so we don't make the same mistake they did or just put us on a better path. Or just to get a better understanding of college and how everything works. I can go ask questions, and it's not a bad thing to have more knowledge.

Participants described that information shared now became a collective resource for their success. The exchange of reassurances as part of the partnership helped them feel more confident in moving forward in the partnership. As Moon describes:

> I actually had a scheduled meeting the day … before spring break, and it was… a little after 11:00 AM when we got an email about COVID – 19. And then right after that, I had my peer mentor meeting. It was nice to talk to her about that. She gave me reassurance to be, you know, well, "We're in this like together. Like no one knows what's happening. It's all evolving." So, it was just really nice to be able to kind of get out how I'm feeling about the situation while she is also feeling the same, like, you know, relating to and helping each other out.

Yair had a similar experience where he drew from his mentor's past experiences to help with navigating financial aid:

> I was, like, really confused about, like, the whole financial aid stuff. And I was, like, "What do you mean I owe this much money? You know, like What do these thousands come from?" And then she told me, "Go on the website and look at this." And then she just displayed all the money I owed, and I was like, "Oh damn." But that also taught me in itself, like hey, I also have these options on the side that I could do, and obviously, I mean this mentoring wasn't the only way I would have found out that information. But it was pretty good when she used to be a first-year student, and she remembers being confused too. "This is what I read; this is what I recommend." And I was like, I really appreciated that experience cause if I didn't have somebody just to check up on that way, I would have felt even more confused than I am now. And I would've just been surviving instead of just going to school.

The significance of shared experiences and information was an important finding derived from this study about the partnership. Participants of the study described potentially being more confused and lost as they navigated their first year if they did not have their mentor's help.

Finding 2: Mentors as Influential Contributors

Participants described their role as a mentee as someone who needed to be receptive to neutral advice. Participants understood that their mentor was someone who was non-judgmental and wanted to contribute positively to their mentoring experience. Participants described how their mentor influenced their major selection, engagement in social organizations, and their own personal development. For Lenny, she found her mentor influential in how she decided on a major:

> I was switching my major, so I needed somebody who wasn't biased towards one, a very neutral one and I was struggling in a course, and he was in the same major I am in now.

> So, he gave me his pros and cons, and then we talked about what I'm into, and he's giving me advice to do what was best for me but wasn't pushing like a decision either. Like "I'm going to give you this and now it's my job to like take it in". So very like non-biased but very open, not like questioning.

For others, their mentor influenced them to get more involved on campus, and as Brielle said,

> She pretty much challenged me to just kind of get out there, if that makes sense. And not hold my cellphone in my dorm room, which I probably wouldn't have if not for her influence because it's much more comfortable to just go to class, go to my dorm. But because of her, like I definitely ventured out, and I did join an on-campus organization.

A simple nudge in the right direction pushed mentees to seek out additional avenues of support, network opportunities, and academic pathways. Mentors also contributed to developing their mentees to step into similar roles, As Moon shares:

> By the end of the school year, I'll be influenced to either be a mentor to someone else or just to even take the information I've gained and use it to the best of my abilities to get myself through sophomore year as well.

Mentees were more likely to take advice from their peer mentor than from others in a support role because they recognized their mentor's commitment to their own growth and developmental journey went beyond a surface level relationship. For many, mentors helped build participants' confidence as students and helped influence participants' ability to recognize their own skills and talents. As Camila shared,

> Whenever I got to Texas State, I was a little bit nervous. But then I heard about the mentor program…. I was like, "Okay, I mean she went through the same thing as me, so I know how she's feeling and how she's going to help me get through it and everything." So, I feel like it made me more confident through the whole semester and made it half of the spring semester.

Similarly, Brielle shared how her mentor helped recognize areas of growth:

> Talking with her [the mentor] showed me how I need to communicate better and how I need to communicate in general and being willing and openminded to receive advice and to talk about things that I don't want to talk about. Cause of friction, it might cause uncomfortability to an extent.

These soft skill developments, often not taught in discipline specific courses, were practiced, and honed through the mentoring relationship. Simply put by Lenny, as she discussed what she would share with her mentor about their influence on her first year:

> I was that seed and you were like that water, and now you're helping me grow into this beautiful plant. Like you're on the journey that you've held me from like, the whole thing. I'd walk in like a baby. Like you're like, "Come on, let's go." And I was just like, "Okay, let's go. You're that first mentor. You had that moment." My life changed, I changed my attitude on school, watching my attitude, like how I want to be.

For Lenny, her mentor provided additional support in realizing her potential for growth and development her first year. She continuously described how thankful she was for the partnership and learning experience.

Even during the COVID-19 crisis, mentors were still influencing their mentees in how to prepare and study. Camila maintained contact with her mentor to see how she was doing, and her mentor influenced her decision to continue with remote learning. This advice was also echoed by Sarah who reached out to her mentor. She said:

> I reached out to my current peer mentor about how, like some tips or advice that she had on how to, I guess, stay organized with online classes. She actually sent me like an, uh, an example or like, yeah, she sent me a picture of her schedule and like how she plans out her weekly assignments and making sure like everything that she has like gets done.

Mentors provided influential advice in helping mentees connect and succeed during their first year. As the institution transitioned to remote learning, mentors became critical in providing support and guidance.

Finding 3: A Provided Companion

Participants described their mentoring relationship as a process that first started when they heard they were going to be paired with a mentor and developed into a mutual partnership. This often-forced relationship was continuously described as a first friend or seen as an older sibling. These roles did not instantaneously develop but evolved as participants and mentors

engaged in the relationship. Lenny found her mentor to be "Someone you can count on. They give off a sense of like they care. They want you to succeed, and then you want them to succeed too." The mutually forced pairing was established through social credentials as the "peer" component allowed for an easier exchange. As Ron shared:

> It feels like I'm not alone at Texas State. Obviously, I know plenty of people here and I've gotten the chance to meet a lot of people. But here I feel like I'm safe with someone. I could really discuss how I really feel about school, how I really feel about the faculty, some opinions I have about some issues we have at the school and other small things. But I just feel like it's really comfortable.

Similarly, Moon established the friendship early on and continued developing through their partnership. As she shared:

> I would say the same way that she's been a friend for me. I've been a friend for her. I think there was one time she was saying that she had a stressful week going on like prior to our peer mentor meeting. And so, I just kinda was asking her as a friend ,"Oh, like is everything okay? How are you doing now?" Even though she is the mentor in the relationship, she could kind of just relax and just talk as friends and help her relax and get some things off her chest.

Others described the relationship as connecting with an older sibling, which was equally important to their transition to the university and modeling good academic behavior from their mentor. The older sibling analogy suggested a deeper relationship; mentees were often privileged to scenarios and situations that only those in an intimate family relationship experienced. As Lala described:

> [Mentoring] is essentially having an older sibling. Like, when you have an older sibling, you've seen what your parents yelled at them for. So, you're like, okay, "I'm not going to do that or I'm going to be more discreet about that one." And so, having someone who's an upperclassman be able to give advice, and especially my peer mentor who is actually in the same major as me was helpful.

Lala continued to discuss how he was lucky to have a mentor who served as his lab assistant and who was able to learn content specific information from them. This allowed seeing his mentor as

a versatile companion afforded to him from the university. For many, their mentor was their first friend and backbone to rely on. As Lenny shared:

> It's just like having that backbone where you're like, "I could fall in a moment." I could text my mentor and be like, "I'm stuck in this situation. Like what do I do? Like work, where can you lead me to?" It's like having that support. I think it is like having that first friend you did and like the first moment you came here so that, like this person knows me from nothing, and like now knows me, how I am as a student and as a person; [the mentor] got to know me. So, having that, like, that relationship, that friendship, but also having that like mentor - mentee relationship. You understand they have their life too in their work so that you can't always rely on them but they're there. If you need their advice on school and work.

The friendship that developed from the mentorship became an accountability relationship. The social capital was further enhanced by relying on each other in academic and social engagements. Participants continued to express how beneficial it was to have a peer, someone they trusted to discuss struggles with. As JB shared:

> They weren't the longest meetings and went smooth, like really meeting a friend for a conversation. And she was really like checking on me, checking on my grades. I didn't feel forced, but nobody checks on me other than my mom. Like, when my mom asks about grades, I need to say, "I'm passing." When my peer mentor asks and I'm not passing, she's like "okay, well, you have all these resources; you can be doing all this and like get it together." So, it was kind of like a good thing. I didn't feel like she was crossing the line.

Mentees saw the relationship as contributing an outside perspective and advice from someone who wasn't going to criticize or devalue their work. The establishment of trust early in the partnership contributed to how comfortable mentees became in sharing their successes and challenges. For instance, Oz shared that the trust she established with her mentor made her feel comfortable with the relationship and in being vulnerable to share more about opportunities she was seeking. As she described:

> I was new to the area and new to, you know, obviously college. So it is really nice to have someone who already has experienced and who could talk to me about their experiences and relate that to my problems and to my situation so I could, you know, become comfortable, more comfortable with where I was living and the new experiences

> I could get comfortable with. And it was just nice to have someone who I could rely on because I knew she went through a lot of the same things that I did. I talked to her about RA stuff and when I interviewed. I was going through the process of interviewing, and I was ranting about it and then she understood because she also did that process too when she was a freshman. So, it was nice to know we could relate.

Brielle also expressed the importance of vulnerability in the relationship and that advice from her mentor was appreciated. During their last meeting, she described that:

> [Our mentor meeting] got kind of personal. I was just telling her what I was experiencing with my faith and what I was experiencing with emotions, and she was giving me some advice, the way of course, like putting me in a vulnerable place, being vulnerable, being open with her. Then also she was putting herself out there by giving me that advice cause she really could have just listened. But I really appreciated that she was actively listening, not just the, mhm, mhm, but giving me feedback.

Participants of the study also described the emotional connection that fueled the mutual exchange. Lala described how the emotional connection he had with his mentor helped him during an unfortunate experience. As Lala described:

> I've talked to her about how my brain is holding up because it's a very stressful situation we're all in. And then my dorm actually experienced a suicide last semester…,and so she, and honestly, everyone who is a part of that was very helpful and help getting through the process of having to deal with that sort of situation, for her too. I don't know what, but I absolutely would like to, I would love to become like her biggest fan and her supporter. Just like how she has been all of our biggest fans. It's like practically a cheerleader. To kinda, like reciprocate. Give back what was given or pay it forward in some way.

The importance of developing an intimate connection with a peer provided participants with the benefits of a companion. Without having a consistent go-to-person, participants' first year might have turned out a bit more different.

Finding 4: A Two-Directional Relationship

The mutually beneficial partnership emerged as a recurring concept; participants continued to describe their experiences in the relationship as a continued reinforced exchange. The exchange was circular; mentees described the support their mentors gave them as well as

their need to participate in their mentors' well-being. This finding was demonstrated in their commitment to shared learning and participation in an interconnected community.

Shared Commitment to Learning

The synergies that developed through the partnership were continuously rooted in shared learning and in the purpose of a college education. It was evident that the partnership was transitionally reciprocated and expanded to other students. As Ron shared:

> In sharing the we had with other people, like how to properly communicate because a lot of great peer mentors are communicating with their peers. We also pass down the knowledge we gained from our peer mentor towards other students. So, it's beneficial in that way. It could also be beneficial because you learn a little bit about another person's ethnicity, their race, how to properly talk to them in case you're ever in that situation again.

Other participants shared how even an expert still needs mentoring and guidance from someone else. Even if it's someone who does not understand an area of expertise, they can still help provide support as a friend on how to be a successful college student. As Sarah shared, "It's still that mentality of okay I got to focus and work hard. Since this is my goal, this is my major, this is a class I am working towards." Modeling good academic behavior contributed to their growth and learning in the relationship.

Similarly, Adam Wallace found that the mutually beneficial relationship allowed him to learn and allowed his mentor to develop additional skills. When asked to further define the partnership, he shared that:

> A mutually beneficial relationship so we can learn from each other, you know support each other if we need to….She can give me the tools that might help me with schooling or advice that might help me with…time management, and then I can provide the social skills of what she needs to get done.

While academic learning was continuously shared as an important contribution in the relationship, participants recalled how important engaging in the relationship went beyond

academics. Other mentees found that by engaging with their mentor, they were reinforcing their own growth. Lenny described how she helped her mentor break out of his shell:

> My mentor was very shy. You could tell he was very awkward. But I gave him that confidence like he gave me; I was like, "Bro, like you're cool. Like, just talk to people. Like, you're great." You give them that confidence back, and you acknowledge that it helps you and give them that acknowledgement back. You really did do a lot for me, and you probably did a lot for others, but you're just like, it gives them the reward feeling back to them.

Lenny helped build up her mentor's confidence that he could take to his other and mentor-mentee relationships. Many participants understood they contributed to the cultural and inclusive development of their mentor. As Lala described about his contribution to the mentorship:

> [On] being around someone who's different than you, there's already growth. And then there's teaching experience in that, because my perspective as like a gay male will be different from her as being a straight female. Just talking about how my experiences have been and how I've been dealing with this, that, these, and, those just let's her in on that world that she doesn't have. She is not a part of, you know what I mean? And there's a lot of benefits that come from that because that information will absolutely help her in the future if she ever interacts with other people who might be somewhat related to me.

Lala described an unexpected salient finding of the study - mentees believe their relationship extends beyond their partnership.

Interconnected Community

The interconnected community was a poignant finding of the study. Reciprocity went beyond their individual mentoring relationship. Mentees contribute indirectly to other mentees based on the relationship with their mentor. As Moon describes:

> I feel, like even though I'm learning things from my mentor, they're also learning things from me and from the other people that they mentor because you're learning the different ways that maybe people have, like experienced life, which could make their learning experience different. You can make the way that they were dealing with the transition, to like living in a dorm, um, different. I feel like it helps me as a mentee to provide feedback to my mentor for things that they could do to help better themselves and better the other people that they're mentoring.

In many ways, engaging in the partnership meant they were part of an interconnected community and actively were contributing to their peers who they might not even know. Jake felt his experiences shared with his mentor could give [the mentor] the knowledge needed to work with another mentee. Similarly, Lala shared that:

> I'm helping her know how to deal with different people. Just like, because I'm someone who's going to be different from the next person, and the next person. Cause we're all different people. I think she's just learning different perspectives and by learning different perspectives, she understands how one instance can impact eight people in eight different ways and have them have eight different reactions.

Furthermore, if mentees feel like they are contributing to other people, they perhaps are more likely to engage in the relationship with their mentor. The hedonic value (described in detail later) expands beyond just one transaction. Information can be multiplied.

Group Mentoring

Trusting someone because one's friend trusts the mentor demonstrated the importance of group mentoring and the value it can have on a student's first year experience. For Adrian R. who switched US 1100 sections, it was easier for him to connect with his mentor because his peers had already established trust and he valued their opinion. In his words, "we built that relationship like a friendship basically. Like, we just would hang out, and it would be perfectly fine. Like I would with any of my other friends here in the course." Trusting his friends allowed him to engage with his mentor in a group setting. This phenomenon was also echoed by Moon who was able to connect with other mentees because of her mentor's study hours. This experience allowed her to engage in relationships beyond her mentoring one. She stated:

> I also feel like I've gotten someone that I can just study with because they started this semester with a new two hours of a study session every week. And I went to that yesterday, and that was really nice…. It was nice to get together, not only with my mentor, but there was another student from one of her other classes that was there and it was just nice to meet new people and you're all there to just study, and it's nice. It's not like you're studying with your best friend where you get distracted and laugh or mess

> around. It's like they are your friends, but you know that you can all just focus on studying, and you're all there just to get your stuff done and still have a good time.

Group mentoring allowed the mentees to connect with other students and build community. As they continued through their first year, they began to build relationships with others and network more.

Summary of Findings from Section II

Whether the relationship was in a group or went beyond the mentor, participants' lived experience acknowledged the mentors as trusted information providers and themselves as willing participants who benefited from the partnership. There were several themes that emerged in this section. Participants felt they benefited and learned from the experiences of their mentor. Their mentor informed, influenced, and shaped their first year of college. Finally, many of the participants began seeing contributions in the relationship, including how they may have been impacting their peers indirectly. Next, Section III discusses more about how mentees describe the reciprocity in the partnership.

Section III: Mentorability, The Phenomenon: How Do Student Mentees Describe the Reciprocity and What They Bring to the Formal Peer Mentoring Partnership?

Within this section, I address findings for Research Question #3 and how mentees understand reciprocity. Using Cropanzano et al's., (2017) SET framework findings in section III addresses how mentees describe reciprocity through the initial contributions of the relationship, their attitudes and behaviors, and their relationship formation.

Finding 1: Mentee Contributions

During the second interview, participants were asked to select and discuss the three most important and three least important characteristics from a list of 11 characteristics. The characteristics are the most frequently listed mentee's roles and responsibilities on mentoring

websites in the United States (Taylor & Black, 2018). This card sorting activity was conducted at the end of the second interview and was intended to contribute to the participants' previous comments to build an in-depth description of their role and further define how mentees viewed their reciprocity in the partnership. Due to COVID-19 disrupting the study, only 11 participants shared their top three and least three contributing factors. Most participants listed "communicative" and "open-minded" as the most important mentee contributions that made their mentoring relationship work.

Communicative

All participants in the study described being communicative as the most important factor in the partnership. In addition, participants mentioned that not only did they have to communicate, but that communication needed to be ongoing and frequent in the partnership. When asked what the most important characteristic of the partnership was, participants overwhelmingly said "communicative":

> " I think it's very important for a mentee to be able to communicate any of their concerns or if there is any confusion or anything that they have." – Sarah
>
> "Communication. I guess the importance of our relationship is based on conversation and based on talking. We didn't bond over anything else besides just our communication." – Lala
>
> "Communicate is always one thing that people need to make sure you're still there on the same page. More than anything else, I try to be, uh, open communicator because I believe that communication can solve literally 99% of any problems." – Leaf
>
> "I put communicative because of course you're going to want them to start the conversation, introduced, and so on. But, like you want to be able to talk to them and them be able to talk to you." – Ron
>
> "Communication, that's kind of obvious about communication. There is no mentee or mentor relationship without it." – Oz

> "Communicative because you have to open up to your mentor, and if you did that they will probably do the same and they'll build a stronger relationship between y'all two."- Abdul

Participants understood that in order for a mentoring relationship to be successful, being communicative was necessary and beneficial. The relationship needed to be rooted in active and frequent communication. Without it, no mentoring partnership would exist.

Open Minded

The other shared characteristic was being open-minded to a mentor's advice and suggestions. This was often the second or third most important to participants:

> "Be, like open-minded, to like different opportunities or resources that the mentor could like give or offer." – Sarah

> "Open-minded because um, in the end a mentee and mentor relationship is a relationship, and I feel it takes both parties to understand one another to be able to give advice, listen to advice, take advice or you know, just have a relationship." - Oz

> "I said open-minded. I'd say, to have, to keep an open mind because that leads to bigger possibilities that this relationship could have in like not only meeting the standards but going above that, and like basically not setting limits to the relationship." – Abdul

> "Open arms and open mind. It's more of like, okay, this is an opportunity." - Lenny

> "Cause like if you're not open-minded, then you're pretty much, well, you're pretty much wasting your time sitting with someone for 30 minutes. If you're not willing to have a conversation, if you're not open-minded to the advice or the topics brought up." – Brielle

Participants indicated that being open-minded and receptive to their mentors' advice was part of their role as mentees. The open-minded perspective was a strong indicator that mentees felt that the mentor was providing good advice, and mentees needed to be receptive to internalizing and taking action on the advice. Being open-minded also contributed to the participants' understanding of their role in the partnership and grounded the mentoring relationship.

When asked to describe their three least important characteristics, all participants described being professional wasn't an important mentee contribution to a peer mentoring

partnership. As Abdul mentioned, "There's been times where both of us haven't been professional and, like that would be just because we're talking as friends, but that's not always a bad thing." Mentees indicated that friendship was a recurring mentor role and being professional wasn't at the forefront of that relationship. Similarly, Oz shared:

> I feel like from my experiences with my mentors, it was never like a book definition of professional. Those very comfortable, like. "Hi, you know, I'm really sad" or like, "I hate doing this thing that I have to do for bio." Like, it was very casual.

Leaf had very similar experiences as to why "professional" wasn't an important characteristic mentees needed to possess. As he describes:

> You're both college students. No one's going to show up in a suit and tie or in a fancy office attire. It's one student helping another student get their way, and it applies. They're not going to help you win the lottery, are not going to help you, you know, show you the cheat codes to pass your test. It's just how it is. "I'm here to help you out if you need anything. If you want to just talk, don't worry. I'm here."

For Leaf and many other participants, the peer aspect not only contributed to the exchange but made the relationship more authentic and real. Mentees were not expecting hand holding in the partnership but rather, support. Lenny took this a step further and described why professionalism was not necessary. As she described her mentor's viewpoint:

> I don't want to ask you like they're talking to someone who's higher than you. They're like we're students together, "like you can talk in our slang, and like you're going to get me. You're young. I'm young." So, I was like, "You don't have to act like a professional. Like don't make this so formal. Like you're meeting in a dining hall." They're just like, come on in.

Finally, Brielle shared how her mentoring relationship went beyond professionalism and that's what made it work: "Within my peer to peer mentor relationship, [professionalism] weren't really things that were there. Not that she wasn't a professional or realistic or any of those, but there was a relatability that went past professionalism." As Brielle further commented, "Once I

realized there was no ulterior motive, then I started to open up to my mentor." Her initial belief delayed her ability to engage and commit initially to the partnership.

Finding 2: Trust as a Gatekeeper to the Relationship Formation

All participants in the study shared a very similar understanding of the importance of trust as a gatekeeper in continuing and valuing the relationship. They were more likely to participate and engage in the partnership because they trusted their mentor to share successes, concerns, and experiences. The hedonic value of the partnership increased through time and so did their continued interactions with their mentor regardless of how trust was established and cultivated. For one participant, this hedonic value began early in the formal partnership. For instance, Oz commented that:

> She's also in a position of authority. So, like I trust her if she does it. If I don't, then like if she does something wrong, then she loses her job. Yeah. So, I would think that I can trust her. She's very, like she's just a friendly person, and I think my first impression was very, it was a good impression. Like we got off on the right foot, and we related to a lot of things. Like we ranted about similar things with each other, and we had similar beliefs as well. So yeah.

Oz was an outlier in her initial reaction to establishing trust very early. For many others, trust did not immediately occur. Instead, for most mentees, relationship formation occurred over time and contributed to many of their decisions academically, socially, and personally.

Establishing Trust for Learning

Participants described trust as a critical factor in how they connected with their mentors and learned from them. For instance, Adrian began to understand that trust in his mentor's advice would be connected to the growth and learning he would experience in his first year. Adrian commented, "I would think you need to trust them to be able to learn from them. If you don't trust them, it's crazy. Don't think you would learn much." His mentor's academic and social advice opened up the opportunity to learn from the partnership. In a similar experience, Camila

also discussed the importance of placing trust in her mentor; she shared personal essays with her mentor that contributed to both relationship formation as well as to improving her writing through peer-review editing. Adam Wallace also expressed his trust in his mentor: "She gave really good advice that, I mean, they put her there for a reason. I have 100% trust in her." Similarly, Yair commented that he trusts his mentor to give him sound academic advice:

> I also texted her like, "Hey, finals are coming up. What's the best way I can like tackle everything together?" And she gave me resources on how to organize myself better. So, it justs, the fact that I can text her about anything, you know what I mean? There's that level of security. Yeah, I'd say that's pretty good in my opinion.

Yair pointed out that his mentor helped him develop a level of security within the academic space, which helped create a trusting relationship with his mentor. Participants' initial treatment of the relationship and academic trust contributed to the development of the relationship and set a foundation towards understanding the reciprocity in the partnership.

Establishing Trust for Institutional Transition

Mentees in the partnership valued the transparency and genuineness in their commitment not only to the partnership but to the institution. They were more likely to build trust when their mentors were committed to their well-being, even if that meant the participant might be better off leaving the institution. JB described how her mentor impacted her decision to stay at the institution. JB describes that:

> [My mentor] impacted me because she didn't put pressure on me to stay here. Like, she didn't force the university on me, but she was just like, "Oh if you're not going to like it or if you want to leave, make sure that you gauge your offers." So she impacted one of the reasons that I chose to stay here. So that was a pretty big impact.

Steve similarly remarked on the importance of his mentor contributing to helping him navigate institutional bureaucracy. Navigating institutional bureaucracy and developing life skills were what established the foundation of trust in the partnership. He remarked that:

> I hate to use the word vibey but vibe for the level. You know, I feel, like if I'm going to tell someone about this struggle going on, it's her. I trusted her enough to tell her about my problems with parking. We discussed credit card debt. So, like I trusted her enough to explain my problems.

Steve also discussed the difference between levels of trust and how his personality impacted those with whom he developed a relationship. In addition, Ron discussed how he established trust with his mentor:

> I wouldn't really trust in her because I feel like she would judge me at first because of the rubric. But after that, like I found out, she's just not like here just to do it cause she's saying she has to do it. But, she actually wants to get to know me and that's when the trust started building.

Steve understood that the value of the partnership started when he finally trusted that his mentor had no ulterior motive; many of the participants expressed this same sentiment. For instance, Brielle commented that:

> I'll hear it from adults or the kind of people I know. But it had a more lasting impact when it was coming from someone who I kind of know has no kind of ulterior motive, if that makes sense. Yeah. And who had used those [university] resources.

As participants knew they could trust their mentor for institutional support they felt more comfortable engaging in the partnership.

Establishing Trust for Personal Development

More than the academic and social development of mentees, trust was most evident in developing their personal identities as college students and how they felt they could contribute to the relationship. Brielle commented that:

> You can build trust by not simply going through the motions during meetings and asking your mentor, "Are you okay? What's been going on in your life?" Because even though it's focused on the mentee, I think it's important to also ask and care about who's trying to care about you.

Jake made parallel remarks: he felt his mentor was there to support him and connect on a variety of levels:

> She just gives off just like one of the best vibes I've ever had for somebody. And you just really connect with them on a level that you just feel like you can talk to them about anything. So yeah, I can definitely trust my friend.

Abdul even described that the relationship would continue past his first-year experience:

> I'd say something important would be really getting to know your mentor because even after your freshman year, like mine's only a junior said she's still going to be a senior. So, it could really become a relationship that you could have, and that's important to have future long term relationships in college. People you can trust.

The trust contributed to the relationship formation and eventually led mentees to understand that they needed to be vulnerable, that in this formal partnership the institution was more than just a one-directional relationship. As Ron communicated:

> I feel like I can be mentored because I will take in what they say, and I would listen to it and actually go out of my way to put more thought into what they say. But I feel at the same time, I would go off on a tangent because of the trust that is there and like I'd want to talk about other personal things and stuff.

The relationship also did not need to be professional. Mentors continued seeing the relationship as a casual and a natural progression in a partnership. This aspect allowed the mentee to trust the mentor with more than just school information. As Sarah describes:

> I guess this especially brings up some like personal things. It's, I feel like at least to me, it's easier to talk to someone who likes a more casual setting. Um, and so because, like I, you know, I didn't have a super like professional relationship with my peer mentor. It's easy to, like talk about some personal things I wanted to bring up.

As the relationship formation became grounded in trust, mentees began to seeing their roles in the relationship shift to an ownership of the partnership as demonstrated by their attitudes and behaviors with their mentor.

Finding 3: Reciprocity, A Multi-level of Exchange

When participants established trust, it became apparent they were able to understand their role and responsibilities more, contributing to the developmental relationship even more. Lala was quick to establish an understanding of reciprocity when he said, "I'm going to be growing

through my own experience and my own time here, and then I'll be helping [the mentor] grow with their time here, and we'll be helping each other. It's absolutely a mutual benefit." Participants described a relationship of emotional commitment, knowledge sharing, motivational exchange, and helping other mentees.

Emotional Commitment

"Reciprocity" is not a word participants often used, but it is one they described in their attitudes and behaviors about the partnerships. This reciprocity was described in their early encounters with their mentors or through continuous instances of engagement. For instance, Ron described how he demonstrated care for this mentor when he found out she was going through a personal issue. Ron recounted that:

> I remember one day, she was really, really distraught. Like, she was really hurt about something in a relationship. So, I kind of was there to help her. Like, you would notice some visible cues like chills were jittery and she didn't want to make eye contact as you would think a professional would. So I asked her, "Is everything okay?" Which she then proceeded to say like, "Oh me and my partner for like two years didn't end off on a good note, something..." So then I told her like, "Oh, it's okay. We're like things happen." And then like I really didn't know how to relate to the situation, so I decided to give her an experience of mine with family members that I had that was similar to it. Then she felt really good about that, and she appreciated what I did for her. I guess she's done a lot for me, so I felt like I had to give something back, something in return.

The many times Ron's mentor provided emotional support for him suggested that he recognized how good he felt afterwards and found additional worth and investment in the partnership. Moon had a similar experience as she worked towards establishing a friendship with her mentor:

> I think there was one time she was saying that she had a stressful week going on, like prior to our peer mentor meeting. And so, I just kinda was asking her as a friend, "Oh, is everything okay? How are you doing now?" Um, and just even though she is the mentor in the relationship, she could kind of just relax and just talk as friends and help her relax and get some things off her chest.

Moon described her own emotional contribution to the relationship and how personal investments in the partnerships also contributed to the mentor valuing her as a mentee and being

vulnerable in the partnership. This led Moon to understand that she could also contribute to the partnership and provide a supportive nurturing environment.

Parallel experiences were also shared by Oz and Yair who would consciously take action and ask their mentors how they were doing. When describing the relationship, Oz proclaimed that:

> I would say, um, any relationship has like give and take. It shouldn't be just you talking. From my experience, you know, when my peer mentor would ask me about my problems, you know, I obviously would rant and everything, but I would also ask about her day. And I think that's really important to have because that establishes a relationship, and if you have a relationship established, it's easier for both parties to share and relate to one another.

Yair acknowledged that his proximity to home was not something he shared with his mentor because he knew adjusting to being apart from family was one of the purposes of having a mentor during the first year. He described one of his interactions by saying:

> I remember she told me she was from Houston, and you know, me being from Austin, like if I want to cry, if I want to have a shoulder to cry, I just go to my mom just like up the highway. But she told me from her perspective how she felt and then she told me what she did, and that tied everything together. Whether it be emotionally, academically, or just getting her cellphone for anything. And from that moment, like I learned from her, and I let that be a guide of what I was doing in my first year.

It was common for participants to contribute to their partnership by being communicative and open-minded as they described finding the importance and value in establishing a relationship. The emotional commitment not only shed light on the purpose of the relationship, but also on how invested participants became in the partnership.

Knowledge Sharing

It was evident that above emotional commitment, knowledge sharing through peer interaction was beneficial not only to their academics but also to their well-being. When participants contributed to the partnership, they understood their role more and felt the

relationship went beyond the classroom environment and part of the grade requirement. The reoccurring consumption of knowledge, from an upperclassman, was shifted to a mutual contribution of knowledge. Several of the participants described this as a two-way transaction. For instance, Adam Wallace understood the relationship was mutually beneficial and that exchanges were to occur. He described the relationship in the following way:

> [It is a] mutually beneficial relationship, so we can learn from each other, you know, support each other if we need to…. She can give me the tools that might help me with schooling or advice that might help me with…time management and then I can provide the social skills of what needs to get done.

Adam Wallace believed meeting with his mentor was to help his mentor "get the job done," and in return he was going to "get tools" which describes his view of a transactional relationship. Similarly, Adrian said, "unconsciously, you know, differences in experiences and perspectives might just pick up on something that they didn't really think about." Leaf furthered this idea with the comment: "She just doesn't have the only impact on me, but I also have an impact on her and give her some feedback, or even give her an idea or another way to do something." Finally, Moon discussed the importance of providing feedback to her mentor. She describes that:

> I would say the biggest thing that I brought to my mentor was just feedback on how she's doing and like showing her my experience so that she could learn from what my experience as a freshman has been. Cause even though she went through freshman year, um, there were different changes this year that went on. So, she's learning how we're coping with it and she's also learning the differences. Like lifestyles that we had, and our experiences, and how they affect us with learning. Um, because you always meet somebody who's different in the way they experience or handle things going on.

Participants' collective shared meaning of reciprocity included the exchange of information as an important contributor between both parties.

Motivational Exchange

Many of the participants discussed the importance of motivation to participate in the relationship was necessary for an exchange to occur. Adrian described that "I think it's like a

two-way thing because if the mentee doesn't have, like motivation, I guess to go to them, then the mentor can't do their job. So they both have to be participating to make it work." Moon shared parallel remarks saying that:

> I would say like even though we're the mentees and we're seeking advice and information, like we still give back information, which is something that they use to help. I believe that they use us to help themselves with their mentoring skills, and like knowing what to do, and what to ask, or like you don't want to say, cause I was also, um, okay. But I just feel like I was able to also provide her with background on what I even personally went through as a student, and what even other students didn't go through the exact same thing we all did when we talked about it in our US 1100 class at some point. Like our background experiences and our opinions and I feel like she did take that into consideration with how she talks to all of us.

Yair shared a very similar response, saying that if mentoring were to occur, motivation to open up and share questions and concerns was critical:

> She's always going to be a mentor, but her responses will always vary on what I have to say or ask and the attitude that she displays when I give a question or when I highlight sorrows and the confusion of what's happening. [Her response] will depend on her reaction of how to deal with it or how to give me sound advice from her perspective. But yeah, at the same time, like when it comes to anything, anyone that can help you or anything that can influence you, it's all about what you say personally. She's not going to know that I have X going on in my life and she doesn't know how to respond to it. She doesn't know what it is, you know? So that all depends on the output of like what you are actually saying as a mentee.

Yair highlighted that the importance of communication and vulnerability in the relationship was to provide an honest and realistic description of experiences mentees have as they engage in the partnership. Without a mentee's communication, mentoring would not have depth or direction to help the student.

Beyond the Mentor/Mentee Exchange

One of the salient findings of the study is examining mentees' reciprocity, and by contributing to the relationship, they were also helping other mentees. They valued their

relationship with their mentor but knew their mentors were also in other mentoring partnerships with other students. As Moon describes it:

> I would say, like even though we're the mentees and we're seeking advice and information, like we still give back information, which is something that they use to help. I believe that they use us to help themselves with their mentoring skills, and like knowing what to do and what to ask, or like you don't know what to say. But I just feel I was able to also provide to her, like background on what I even personally went through as a student, and what if the other students didn't go through the exact same thing we all did when we talked about it in our [University Seminar] class at some point. Like, our background experiences and our opinion. And I feel like she did take that into consideration with how she talks to all of us.

Others shared similar sentiments; many discussed how their own backgrounds brought a unique contribution to the partnership. Participants found it important to verbally communicate how they were different. Abdul shared that, "I tell her that not everyone you're gonna mentor is going to be the same person and everyone has their flaws or whatever, and we are all different people." The mentees' own cultural wealth not only allowed the mentee to understand not only their own value in the partnership but also to see how they shaped their mentors' interactions with other mentees.

Parallel remarks were shared by both Jake, Lala, and Lenny, who reiterated that their relationship extended beyond their own partnership with their mentor. As Lala shared:

> I'm helping her know how to deal with different people. Just like, because I'm someone who's going to be different from the next person, and the next person. Cause we're all different people. I think she's just learning different perspectives, and by learning different perspectives, she understands how one instance can impact eight people in eight different ways and have them have eight different reactions.

Lala's description of eight different perspectives not only alluded to the mentor having relationships with other mentees but also the extension of the reciprocity in the exchange. Lenny shared the following in-depth description:

> They're meeting with multiple students. They're not meeting with just you. You may want to have a longer conversation, but at the same time you have to respect their time.

> You could have told them something and they would have like forgotten and you're just like, "Oh. Like, I thought they would have reached out back and answered questions." But you're like, "Ahhh." But they're dealing with 60 other students. Yeah. There's like, "Oh, that's understandable."

Similarly, Jake summed it up when he shared how he contributed to the partnership. When asked about the relationship, he shared that: "I feel like it goes back and forth. I gave something, she could gain something….I could experience something that she hasn't been, she hasn't been asked yet. Which could help her knowledge with the next person she's helping." For many, the overall consensus was that the relationship extended beyond just the mentor and mentee.

Summary of Findings for Section III

Participants in the study were eager to share how they engaged and developed reciprocity in the partnership. By examining their own mentorability and willingness to engage in the partnership, participants identified two key characteristics: (a) being communicative and (b) being open-minded as necessary contributions to the relationship. Once mentees felt they could contribute to the partnership, trust became crucial in their ability to open and build a relationship with their mentor. Trust allowed for the relationship to evolve and helped participants develop other areas in their lives that went beyond being a student.

Summary of Findings

This chapter discussed findings for each research question and further defined mentorability, the phenomenon under study. Participants described their initial attitudes and behaviors when first engaging in the relationship and how the partnership evolved. Initially, mentees were unsure and unclear of the purpose of the relationship or how to engage with it. By participating in meetings, they were able to see the benefits they received from the partnership as well as their own contribution to it. This understanding allowed them to view their mentor as being a lifeline to their success.

Mentees' social capital and shared experiences revealed an opportunity for growth and development with the peer assistance of their mentor. Mentees were information seekers simultaneously, as their mentors were influential contributors to their first year at the University. Together, they created a companionship that was reinforced by a mutually beneficial social exchange.

Participants' roles as a mentees not only helped develop their mentors' growth, but also contributed to strengthening their peer's commitment to their academics and to the campus community. Finally, their mentorability was defined by their commitment, open-mindedness, and trust in the attitudes and behaviors through the relationship formation. This formation led to their understanding that their reciprocity was multi-level in nature and extended beyond their mentor/mentee relationship. The next chapter discusses an analysis of these findings and implications to support research and practice.

Chapter 6: Discussion & Implications

This final chapter discusses the findings from the research study that was aimed at understanding mentorability in a formal mentoring relationship. Included in this chapter are an overview of the study, a discussion and synthesis of the key findings, and implications for future research, practice, and mentoring theories. This chapter concludes with limitations and introduces a mentorability conceptual model for practice.

Overview of the Study

Higher education today has reemphasized the importance of degree attainment and completion. Retention is one of the measurable outcomes linked with institutional performance, state and federal funding appropriations, and publicized rankings (Hagedorn, 2012). Institutions have therefore been intentionally focused on providing a robust first-year college experience, including high-impact practices intended to help with adjustment, transition, and retention of students during their first year. Mentoring, as an important component of a student's first year and undergraduate experience, has been extensively reviewed and studied (Crisp et al., 2017).

One area yet to be explored is how mentees view themselves in the mentoring partnership (Crisp et al., 2017; Gershenfeld, 2014; Miller, 2004). Mentorability is a term that conceptualizes mentees' ability to engage in a mutually beneficial and developmental relationship (Reddick, 2014). In other words, mentorability is understanding how mentorable students are when and while engaging in the partnership. Building on mentorability as a concept and examining first-year students as mentees in a formal mentoring program at an HSI, this study described the lived experiences of mentees and how they perceived their ability to commit, contribute, and engage in a peer mentoring partnership.

For the purposes of this study, I used three theoretical frameworks that helped in developing a conceptual model for mentorability. The three theoretical frameworks were: Astin's (1993) student involvement model (I-E-O), social capital (Lin, 2001), and SET (Cropanzano et al., 2017). I used Astin's (1993) I-E-O model as a theoretical framework to capture a specific point in a student's mentoring partnership by focusing on the beginning of the Environment stage in the early development of the partnership. Second, social capital guided Research Question 2 in examining how mentees received and engaged in accessing a mentor's human capital and how it contributed to their relationship and personal development. Social capital is the "investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace" (Lin, 2001, p. 19). Finally, I used SET (Cropanzano et al., 2017) to examine the phenomenon of mentorability and understand how mentees describe their reciprocity.

The purpose of this study was to understand how mentees perceive their ability to engage in a peer mentoring partnership at the early onset of the relationship during a student's first year in a formal mentoring program at a large HSI in the American Southwest - Texas State University. This institution was selected due to the robust first-year experience program, an established and certified mentoring program, and because of my direct involvement with the program and access to research participants. Utilizing Astin's (1993) I-E-O model, Lin's (2001) social capital, and Cropanzano et al., (2017) SET frameworks, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do student mentees describe their expectations at the beginning of the formal peer mentoring partnership?

Research Question 2: How do student mentees describe their lived experiences in the formal peer mentoring partnership?

Research Question 3: How do student mentees describe the reciprocity and what they bring to the formal peer mentoring partnership?

Chapter Three outlined the methodology for the study. I employed a phenomenological approach and considered the lived experiences of 17 first-year students at Texas State University, an HSI. (Moustakas, 1994). The research site was a 4-year public institution in the American Southwest with 38,000 students and was selected because of its diverse student population and its robust first-year experience program. Data collection included an initial online Qualtrics demographic questionnaire and two semi-structured interviews during the participants' first year at Texas State University, including participating in a card-sorting activity (Spradley, 1979). Due to COVID-19, six participants were unable to continue with the research study after the transition to remote learning occurred. To analyze the data, I used open and axial coding simultaneously and identified shared meanings and themes amongst the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). Two rounds of deductive and inductive coding helped identify the emergent themes discussed in Chapter Five of this study (Miles et al., 2014).

Chapter Four provides descriptive information about each of the 17 research participants, including their definition of mentoring, a description of their relationship with their mentor, and my perception of their understanding of mentorability. I continued with Chapter Five where I discussed the key findings for each of the three research questions. The findings were separated into three sections to coincide with each research question and the theoretical frameworks used to guide the interview protocol and study. The remainder of this chapter discusses key findings, future implications for research, practice and mentoring theories, the limitations of the study, and a conceptual framework for advancing mentorability.

Discussion of Key Findings

This section elaborates on the three key findings of the study presented in Chapter Five. The first finding describes a mentee's initial reaction to and perception of entering a mentoring partnership. The second finding identifies how students navigate and interact during the mentoring relationship and how they viewed their mentor. Last, the third finding focuses on how mentees describe their role and contributions to the partnership.

Key Finding 1: Mentorability as a Process: From Unclear Expectations to a Lifeline for Success

Unclear About Mentoring

It was evident that the mentees were unclear about their role and were apprehensive to participate and develop a relationship with an assigned peer mentor. The upper-class peer mentor was provided and was there to guide their transition, and initially the participants viewed the idea of mentoring as a one-way transactional relationship. Participants from the study initially revealed they understood that it was a required part of their grade for US 1100; however, they had an obscure understanding of the purpose of the partnership. Furthermore, there were unclear instructions on how to engage, and many participants wondered and worried if they were going to be compatible or connect with their mentor. In the literature, this is attributed to why mentoring partnerships have failed (Hall et al., 2008; Hansman, 2003; Straus et al., 2003). Initially, the lack of understanding caused mentees to create barriers for meeting with their mentor, such as having a lack of interest, time constraints, and the fear of imposed advice and resources. Only a few participants described looking forward to the relationship and to having an upperclassman to help them. This study extends previous research that showed the need for mentees to commit individually to the partnership (Baker & Griffin, 2010) and that a mentee's

predispositions may influence the outcome of the partnerships (Henry et al., 2011). The different types of initial perceptions alluded to the various levels of mentorability likely shaped by their previous experiences.

Value-Added

Once participants of the study moved past their initial apprehension and concern for engaging in a new relationship, they began seeing the mentoring partnership as contributing to their overall transition and success. This change in perspective allowed them to establish a strong foundation built on trust, confidence, and comfortability. Participants described their mentor as their first friend and as someone who helped them find purpose and a connection to the campus. This finding builds on previous research that successful mentoring partnerships are rooted in reciprocity and must be meaningful (Holt & Fifer, 2016). Trust was also equally important in creating a foundation for a strong partnership.

As a formal mentoring program, rubrics or guided questions used to help the mentor were a barrier in helping mentees build rapport with their mentor. For example, most participants shared that authentic conversations that allowed the relationship to develop happened only after the mentor finished asking the required questions. The importance of casual and organic conversations was a key aid in connecting and developing the mentoring partnership.

Lifeline to Success

As the relationship continued developing, participants described the mentoring relationship as a lifeline to their academic success, as a connection to campus, and as creating a sense of belonging. Their mentor now was an active contributor to how their first year was shaping out to be. Mentors began normalizing academic behaviors, became accountability partners, and helped with time management. Participants revealed that mentors helped them feel

like they belonged on campus and could build community with their peers. This finding aligns with previous research that found that peer mentors helped students feel more connected to campus once they developed an emotional connection with a peer (Moschetti et al., 2018; Rios-Ellis et al., 2017; Yomtov et al., 2017). Mentoring was a process with many points of growth and development for both mentor and mentee. More specifically, the initial reaction of a mentee at the onset of the partnership shifted from initial apprehension to seeing their mentor as a valuable resource to their success. This finding further established mentoring as a process and as a continuous developmental relationship.

Key Finding 2: Mentorability: Defining their Role Through Examining their Experiences in the Formal Peer Mentoring Partnership

Mentees described their lived experiences in the partnership by identifying their role, how they viewed their mentor and mentoring partnership, and as an extension of their responsibilities in the engagement. The mentoring partnership was also examined through the social capital theoretical framework, leveraging mentors as human capital through the transfer or a transaction of an exchange to the mentee (Lin, 2001). As described in detail below, mentees accessed their mentor for information and experiences throughout the process but understood that their mentoring relationship extended further to their peers (Figure 6.1). This idea of an extension of their role indirectly impacting their peers through the vehicle of their mentor is congruent with Lin's (2001) social capital theory in that the development is not just two directional but rather multi-dimensional. The accumulation of resources in this case, the mentees' knowledge, and experiences, can accelerate mentees' investment and development in the partnership.

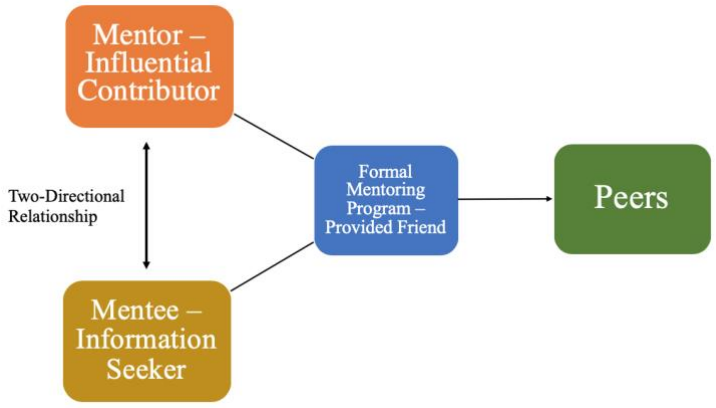

Figure 6.1. Mentees' Description of the Formal Mentoring Partnership

Mentees as Information Seekers

In this study, mentees became information seekers, thus viewing their mentors as a resource connecting them to other resources, and they saw themselves as benefiting from the mentor's experiences, which became tools in their transition and development. Findings from the study showed participants utilizing their mentor so as to become more efficient with their time and as help when needing to navigate institutional procedures and policies. Mentors became the first people and starting point mentees would go to with concerns and questions. All the participants shared that at one point they went to their mentor for assistance ranging from academic support, and social engagement, to personal advice. This assistance allowed them to connect and trust their mentor exponentially and further enhanced their ability to be mentored. As mentees began getting comfortable with their mentor, information shared about their mentors' experiences as first-year students became a tool for avoiding potential pitfalls and common mistakes made by first-year students. A mentor's shared experiences increased the relatability of the peer partnership and provided a level of reassurance and validation in the mentees' struggles. This aligns with previous research that highlights the importance of a "peer" relationship in establishing and fostering engagement (Angelique et al., 2002; Beltman &

Schaeben, 2012; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Salintiri, 2005). Without a mentor, mentees might have been more confused and lost as they navigated their first year.

Mentors as Influential Contributors

One finding from the study revealed how mentees saw their mentor as an influential contributor to their success, and this finding coincides with previous research (Crisp et al., 2017; Scandura & Williams, 2004; Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Yomtov et al., 2017). As an influential contributor, participants were receptive to their mentors' unsolicited advice and helpful techniques once they established their authoritative and genuine role to help them advance. Mentees were influenced in major selection, engaging in social organizations, personal development, study skills, and remote learning. The helpful nudge from their mentor helped mentees seek out additional avenues of support and contributed to the sense of social capital and giving back to future mentees or in developing self-advocacy for themselves. Mentors also helped mentees in soft skill development such as communication skills and networking techniques.

A Provided Companion

Participants from the study described their mentor as either an older sibling or a trusted friend. The assigned relationship evolved into a supportive and trusted partnership. The ability to have a peer, someone close in age, reinforced the social credential needed to accept advice and build confidence in the sincerity of their mentor (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salintiri, 2005; Yomtov et al., 2017). This relationship led to mentees opening up more about their struggles and transition and allowed for academic nudges, accountability checks, and a sense of commitment to the relationship. The importance of seeing their mentor as

a provided companion helped shape how a mentee became vulnerable and allowed a mentor's human capital to be exchanged successfully.

A Two-Directional Relationship

Most participants described how their mentoring partnership was a two directional, mutually beneficial exchange. The relationship was based on the continued reinforced exchange of shared experiences and information for not only their mentor but for their fellow classmates as well. This echoes Holt and Fifer's (2016) study on mutually receptive and meaningful engagement in a partnership. The relationship contributed to a shared commitment to learning, as all participants in the study were still pursuing their undergraduate degree. Modeling good academic behavior and developing a variety of skill sets became a common mentee lesson, but mentees revealed that they felt they were contributing to their mentors' professional development as well. Most participants described how their mentoring relationship was part of a larger interconnected community. When group mentoring occurred, it reinforced the role of the mentor in helping students be successful. In addition, the mutually beneficial relationship extended beyond just their mentor, as there was a strong desire to help their mentor and other peers. While previous research has demonstrated benefits of group mentoring (Apprey et al., 2014; Kostovich & Thurn, 2013) as a common contribution to the reinforcement of the partnership, this study found benefits beyond the group setting, leading to a key finding on mentees understanding of their role and contribution.

Key Finding 3: Mentorability: The Phenomenon: How Mentees Understand the Partnership

In conceptualizing mentorability and understanding the phenomenon, findings from this study suggest it is a multi-level concept that builds from the mentee characteristics, into the

relationship formation, and into the various different types of exchanges that occur in the partnership (see Figure 6.2). This Mentorability model is discussed in detail below.

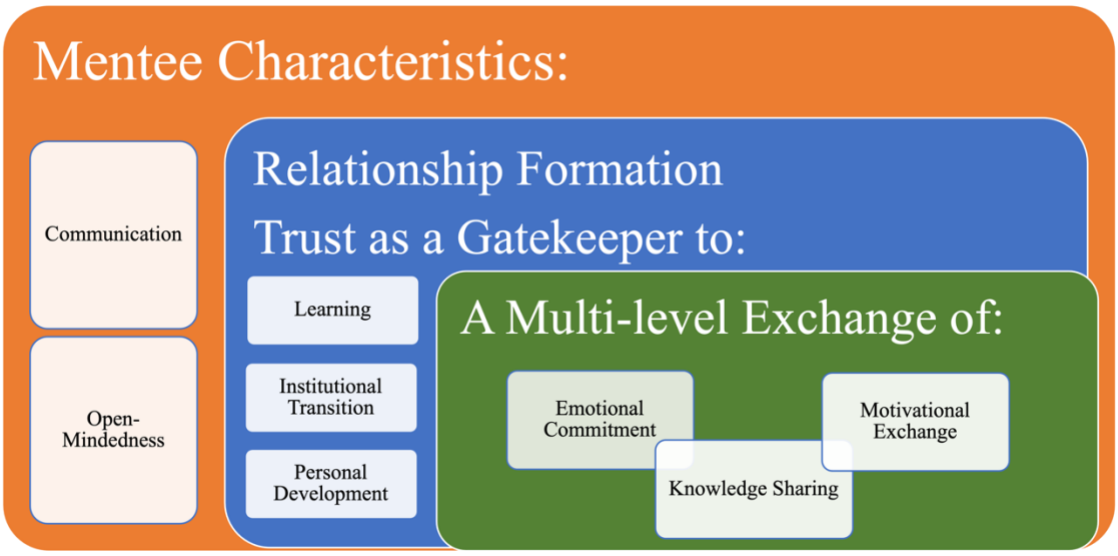

Figure 6.2. Model of Mentorability – Understanding the Phenomenon (Black, 2020)

Mentee Contributions

Participants described their role in the partnership by being communicative and open-minded while engaging with their mentor. Communication was the top factor in what made a mentoring relationship work. Participants shared that no mentoring relationship would work if both the mentor and mentee were not communicating. A second top characteristic was being open and receptive to a mentor's advice and suggestions. Not only did they need to listen to the advice but oftentimes needed to act on the advice as well. These mentee characteristics were necessary for the development of the relationship and allowed for a trusted space for an exchange to occur and for seeking the benefits of the mentorship. These direct and actionable characteristics allow mentees to begin expressing and sharing their lived experiences that further contribute to the partnership and their understanding of mentorability (Lin, 2001; Moll et al.,

2012; Yosso, 2005). Mentees' knowledge and experiences accelerate their investment and development in the partnership and along with trust allow for a multi-level of exchange to occur.

However, the least important characteristic for all the participants was professionalism. Most felt that even though it was a formal relationship, there was nothing formal about it and confessed that professionalism was not part of the relationship. This aspect represents a similar finding from my pilot study and reinforced the disconnect between how mentoring program websites describe mentee characteristics and how actual mentees view their role (Taylor & Black, 2018). Professionalism was listed as the most frequent depiction of mentee characteristics needed on mentoring websites (Taylor & Black, 2018). This finding indicates that mentoring program websites might be disconnected to how mentees view themselves in the partnership and add to the low trust in the establishment of the partnership. Mentees entering in the formal partnership may be misguided if "formal" and "professional" are communicated as necessary foundational behaviors of the partnership, possibly leading to mistrust and a less actionable commitment from the mentee (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Social Exchange Theory emphasizes the importance of communicating expectations early and clearly. Findings from this study align in focusing on mentee preparation and roles early in helping establish a foundational commitment to the partnership.

Trust as a Gatekeeper

An important finding from the study is the development and establishment of trust. An important element of SET is both relational and behavioral actions and inactions that contribute to the development and establishment of trust (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Molm et al., 2000). Participants from this study revealed that they only considered themselves mentees when they trusted their mentor. Trust allowed them to continue and to value

the mentors in the relationship and grew stronger as time and interactions reoccurred between the mentor and mentee. Once trust was established, mentees were more likely to heed advice on academics, build a level of security with their mentor, transition to the campus community successfully, and be vulnerable in the relationship. In grounding the relationship formation in trust, mentees' reciprocity increased and created a brave space for their mutual growth and development. These findings are consistent with SET and further suggest that trust is a critical construct in one's mentorability (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Molm et al., 2000). Participants also actively reflected on why trust allowed them to participate and engage as a mentee in the partnership. This finding contributes to mentorability being an iterative process often needed in the continued formation and establishment of the partnership.

A Multi-Level of Exchange

When participants established trust, their attitudes and behaviors shifted, and their attitude and behavior were congruent with successful partnerships (Astin, 1993; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Huss et al., 2002; Salinitri, 2005; Schreiner et al., 2011; Tinto, 1993). This trust took shape in how they provided an emotional commitment to the partnership, supported knowledge sharing, participated in motivational exchange, and understood that their partnership went beyond the mentor/mentee pairing. By providing an emotional commitment, participants shared that their personal investment in the partnership was emotionally ingrained, as they shared how they cared deeply about their mentor, oftentimes going out of their way to be a reassuring friend. Participants also shared they felt validated in the partnership when they were able to teach their mentor something. The knowledge sharing opportunities reinforced the "peer" component of the relationship, and mentees felt more purposeful in the partnership. In a mentoring relationship, the power of a peer can be a very influential factor in their academic journey

(Beltman & Schaeben, 2012; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salintiri, 2005; Yomtov et al., 2017). When mentees participated in a motivational exchange, they continued to highlight the importance of communication that allowed for vulnerability and honest feedback. The ability to be self-aware and vulnerable, thereby allowing the contribution to their shared experiences in the exchange further establishes the capital mentees bring to the partnership (Lin, 2001; Moll et al., 1992; Yosso, 2005).

Finally, the most poignant finding from the study was that mentees believed their reciprocity extended beyond their mentor to other first-year students indirectly through their contributions to their mentoring relationship. This finding aligns with the SET framework in describing organizational citizenship behavior, which. describes an actor being in an exchange that is not self-derived but promotes efficiency and effectiveness in an organization (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Mentees understanding their engagement with their mentor may help shape others, may contribute to mentees, taking more ownership in the partnership, thus contributing, and expanding mentorability to others not in the partnership. This has been echoed in additional studies, such as Reddick, Griffin, & Cherwitz (2011) who found when graduate student mentors were mentees the developmental benefits went beyond the relationship. Now as mentors, they felt compelled to give back because of previous mentoring relationships.

Limitations

This study adds to the robust mentoring literature and addresses a gap in focusing on mentee development. As with any study, limitations are inevitable and expected. The following section presents the limitations of this study.

Participants

Everyone who participated in the study completed a questionnaire that acknowledged they had not previously engaged in a formal mentoring partnership. As a major focus of the study was having participants with no previous experience in a partnership, this stipulation may have limited findings by not including those with prior experiences and how their mentorability contributed to their participation in a first-year formal mentoring program. Participants were also very engaged in their partnership, and their experiences may be different than others who might not have connected with their mentor. Secondly, participants of the study derived from one institution and one first-year cohort. Therefore, the single-site institution in the American Southwest, the focused population of the study, and a small sample size can impact the generalizability of the findings to other mentees, mentoring programs, or larger audiences. However, the intent of this study was to begin exploring the concept of mentorability and how mentees viewed their role and responsibility, which can inform practice and further exploration.

Another limitation of the study was the recruitment of participants. Many of the participants were recruited using snowball sampling from their faculty and academic advisors. This approach to recruitment may have led to mentees who were pre-conceived in connecting to anyone who would provide support on campus. Understanding that there is no one way to be mentored and that mentoring is an art with many moving parts contributing to its success, findings may have been influenced and motivated by their own personality in connecting with someone. In addition, it was difficult to account for mentees' experiences - including their own funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and the cultural wealth they brought to the relationship (Yosso, 2005), which, may have impacted their willingness to engage in the partnership.

Research Design

During the 2020 spring semester and during data collection, the world was unfortunately impacted by a viral illness that changed how higher education institutions functioned. As the world fought the illness, Texas State University administrators sent students home as we transitioned to remote learning for the remainder of the spring 2020 semester. Prior to COVID-19, I had met with all 17 participants and had scheduled each participant for three different focus groups right after spring break. Students only returned to the institution after spring break to move out of their residence hall, as COVID-19 began to manifest rapidly in the United States and Texas. Additional modifications were made on the second interview to accommodate participants' availability and technology accessibility. This modification included changing the research design from focus groups to a combination of focus groups and interviews. Therefore, data collection was interrupted, and six participants did not participate in the second interview, which contributed, to a reduction in participation. Limitations of this study also included implementing ethical and quality considerations that were necessary to support authentic findings and led to the discussion and implications of the study.

Positionality – My Own Reflections

Initially, I began this study in trying to explore how to strengthen mentoring partnerships to help better prepare peer mentors for their role. As a director of a mentoring program assessing and adjusting practices and program functions has always been an important element of my leadership. I have witnessed successful mentoring partnerships, and in contrast have seen partnerships never develop. Mentoring relationships fail for many reasons, but I have always questioned why. In learning more about mentorability, I was keen to exploring how mentees learn and develop into having a partnership. In conducting this study and exploring

mentorability, I learned the importance of listening to mentees and their experiences and how to use their contributions to understand the program from the perspective of those who it serves, how it functions, and its purpose and objectives. I knew seeking feedback from the constituents would allow for a deeper understanding of their lived experience from the beginning of the relationship to the end. The lens of a practitioner and researcher has allowed me to connect research and practice to directly applying what I am learning from research and my day-to-day operations. This lens has also allowed me to draw direct parallels from both roles to develop implications. These implications are reflected below.

Implications for Future Research

This study sought to answer Crisp et al.'s, (2017) call to understanding mentees' roles in the partnership. Mentees want to talk about their experiences and their value in their role in the partnership. Understanding one's mentorability can help better shape how mentees begin their mentoring journey and can prepare them to enhance the relationship. Although this study only focused on a small group of students at an HSI institution, future research should continue to clarify and explore mentees' mentorability upon entering in the partnership, including how training and prior experiences shape their ability to engage in the partnership.

Secondly, since this study primarily focused on individuals with no prior mentoring experience, how do those in continued developmental relationships prepare, reflect, and engage in the partnership? Also, when organic mentoring partnerships emerge, does one's mentorability differ from those participating in formal partnerships? Subsequently, if mentees are at the forefront of the partnership, how does changing the narrative and culture to mentee- ownership impact the partnership? Since participants in this study were undergraduate first-year students in a peer relationship, future research should explore various types of mentoring relationships such

as: faculty/faculty, faculty/student, and community member/student perceptions of mentee experiences.

Phenomenological qualitative research is intended to explore a concept, identify a shared meaning from participants, and highlight the lived experiences of a phenomenon. For this study, mentorability was first introduced in the literature in 2014, and it is a relatively new concept (Black & Taylor, 2018; Reddick, 2014; Taylor & Black, 2018). Research to develop a mentorability scale, like Crisp's (2009) CSMS survey that examined the outcome of a mentoring relationship, could be used as a guide to focus on the input of a mentoring partnership. Developing a scale can help prepare mentees to understand their role and fit within a mentoring partnership as well as identify areas of potential growth to discuss with their mentor. A scale could also allow them to understand what they bring to the partnership, how they make sense of the partnership, and how prepare both mentee and mentor prior to the engagement.

This study was not bound to a specific gender, race, ethnicity, or culture, although participants were very diverse. Additional research avenues should explore how mentees view their role as they are impacted by cross-racial, cross-ethnic, cross-gender mentoring partnerships (Early, 2017) or race/ethnic and gender specific mentoring programs. For instance, a study by Colvin and Ashman (2010) found gender makes a difference for men who focus on academic benefits while women are geared towards relationship outcomes.[2] More studies are needed for exploring how mentees view relationships with a variety of individuals similar and different than them.

Finally, mentoring literature has continuously critiqued how no theoretical framework exists to support mentoring focused efforts (Crisp et al., 2017). Additional research could further

[2] This study focused only on gender binary findings.

identify typology frameworks and move toward characteristics that support one's mentorability and the effectiveness of partnerships. Several participants alluded to stages mentees experience in a mentoring relationship. Future research should explore how the stages of the partnership impact the engagement, sustainability, and longevity of the relationship.

Implications for Practice

In sharing implications for practice, findings from this study support the need to introduce a mentee curriculum prior to engaging in the mentoring relationship for formal mentoring programs. A mentee curriculum could inform and enhance a mentees' understanding of their mentorability and prepare them to engage fully. A mentee curriculum could include the purpose of a formal mentoring relationship, the opportunity for individual reflection prior to engaging and throughout the mentoring process, the importance of building and sustaining a trusting partnership, and suggested tips and practices on how to get the most out of a mentoring relationship.

Mentoring programs can begin creating a mentee input and collaboration culture where a mentee's perception is taking ownership at the beginning of the partnership and not just focusing on mentoring outcomes. Descriptions of mentee expectations should also be outlined in program materials including program websites and distributed materials and should be encouraged to be reviewed prior and during the partnership. As institutions are focused on retention as a success measurement, allowing mentoring programs to prepare mentees may lead students to be more invested and connected student to the campus community. This preparation could allow a peer mentor to be influential in supporting a mentee's academics and social transition to campus. Focusing on mentees at the onset of the formal relationship can help mentees take ownership of the partnership and can allow them to engage fully.

One of the findings of this study demonstrated that organized rubrics or guided questions given to mentors are not as effective and may deter the mentee from an authentic and genuine relationship, thus preventing the formation of the partnership. There are critical points during a student's first year, and mentors may need to review and guide mentees through the experiences; however, a question/answer format does not allow a mentee to feel comfortable or does not allow them to bring something to the partnership. If a guided questionnaire is to be used to support conversations at key points of the year, it should not be used during formal meeting times and should perhaps be memorized or rehearsed ahead of time.

No one anticipated the unforeseen impact of COVID-19 on higher education. Results of the study did show the important role peer mentors continued having on a mentee's development and the rapid need to connect to a virtual community. Mentees understood that their mentor was a resource to them during the transition to remote learning and knew the importance of a shared experience with their mentor. Programs can continue supporting virtual engagement and can maintain connecting and building community during times when face-to-face engagement is not available. In addition, early outreach to mentees allowed mentees to feel heard and valued. This is an important step to maintaining a mentoring relationship and should be explored as a best practice for mentee transition regardless of modality.

As institutions become more diverse, examining, and increasing student success support programs are necessary. Peer mentoring programs become the forward-facing lifeline to the well-being of student's and may impact their commitment to their education and institution. At an institutional level, creating an inclusive and supportive mentoring culture can lead to mentees connecting to the campus community and lead to increased retention and graduation rates.

Implications for Theory: A Conceptual Model for Mentorability in Engaging in the Partnership

This study drew from a variety of social science theories to inform and help develop a conceptual model for applying Mentorability in a mentoring relationship. First, this study used Astin's (1993) I-E-O model to time-bound the study and focus on the early stages of a mentoring partnership. Mentoring programs focus on mentee or programmatic outcomes; however, limited studies explore perceptions of mentees early in the relationship (Black & Taylor, 2018; Gershenfeld, 2014; Miller, 2004; Searby, 2014). Second, Lin's (2001) social capital framework helped in developing research questions for examining how mentees describe their lived experience. As discussed in Chapter 2, mentoring exchanges occur through information (more knowledgeable and experienced peers with campus resources), influence in the power dynamic (how a mentor can be instrumental in connecting a mentee to resources), the social credentials needed to navigate a college environment, the commitment needed to sustain a partnership (the relationship building and trust between both parties), and reinforcement (the continued interaction and mutual commitment to the partnership). Findings from this study described mentees as information seekers and their mentors as influential contributors, and both mentor and mentee have key roles and responsibilities in a mentoring partnership. Finally, the Cropanzano et al. (2017) SET framework allowed an understanding of reciprocity and how mentees committed to the partnership. The more hedonic value and active behaviors mentees described, the more involved mentees were in the partnership contributing to their own mentorability. The most salient finding of the entire study was that their reciprocity in the partnership did not just stop with their mentor but extended to other peers as the mentor became a vehicle for information exchange. This finding supports other findings from a previous study

that have found that a reciprocal mentoring relationship supported indirect benefits such as cultural commitment, that extend beyond the mentor-mentee dyad (Reddick et al., 2011).

Using the aforementioned theories and by exploring mentees' lived experiences and developing the meaning of what it means to be a mentee engaging in the partnership, I am developing a mentorability conceptual model for engaging in the partnership. This model was derived from key findings from the three research questions, from analyzing the participants' experiences, and by making meaning of their shared experience to understand the phenomenon of study - mentorability (Figure 6.3).

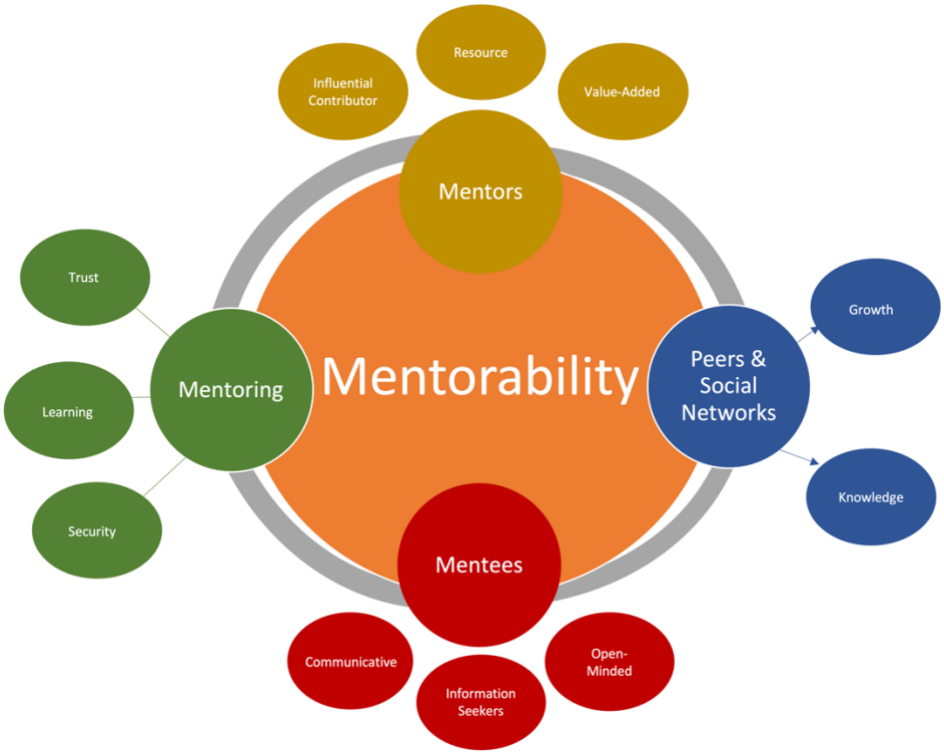

Figure 6.3. Mentorability – A Conceptual Model for Practice (Black, 2020)

Explanation of Model

The mentorability conceptual model demonstrates the roles of both mentor and mentee and the process of a mentoring partnership and builds upon the previous model of understanding mentorability (Figure 6.2) and extends it by describing mentoring as a circular process. The

mentor and mentee are introduced into a mutually beneficial exchange by bringing their own experiences to the partnership. Mentee contributions include their own experiences and their commitment focuses on their roles and responsibilities as a mentee in being open-minded, communicative, and information seekers. Mentors are value-added individuals who are both resourceful and influential in the mentee's experience. The mentoring relationship at minimum must be grounded in trust, learning, and a sense of security. This grounding allows for growth and knowledge, not only between both mentor and mentee but also extends to peers and other social engagements.

At the core of the role for mentees should be the need of communicating with their mentors, being receptive to their advice, and seeking information. Communication is a key strength of any relationship, regardless of the modalities used in communicating. Secondly, a mentee's ability to be open-minded to a mentor's information, advice, and suggestions allows for an opportunity for growth and development. Being vulnerable and willing to experience change can lead to a student's transformation, transition, and development. Finally, mentoring programs would not exist if they were not intending to provide some type of information to the mentee. Mentees must understand that seeking out information is part of how they engage in the partnership.

Within the mentoring relationship, mentors are value-added individuals contributing to their mentee's experience. This is done by both contributing as a resource to mentees or by connecting mentees to resources. Secondly, mentors are influential contributors to their mentee's success and can positively shape their experiences. Once a mentee understands both in attitude and behavior that their mentor is a value-added source and that mentees contribute to the partnership, then they enter a two-directional mentoring relationship. Through a mentoring

partnership, both mentor and mentee engage in a trusting relationship, learn from each other, and create a security exchange. The engagement may have many benefits with these three aspects cultivating the partnership. Finally, the outcomes of a mentoring relationship lead to the growth and knowledge sharing that extend beyond just the two individuals in the partnership and to those interactions beyond the mentoring relationship, to other peers and social networks.

Significance of Model

This model for mentorability was designed to illustrate the roles and contributions of individuals engaging in a mentoring partnership. The intent of the model is to guide mentoring programs in preparing mentees for the engagement and the purpose of the mentoring relationship. Since mentorability is a relatively new concept, this model provides an initial framework to contribute to the direction and applicability of mentoring practices. While the model is not meant to fit every mentoring relationship or be a check box of mentoring program success, it can be used as a guide to help maximize and establish peer mentoring partnerships early and contribute to supporting mentoring relationships.

Concluding Thoughts

Building on mentorability as a concept and examining first-year students as mentees in a formal mentoring program at an HSI, this study sought to understand and explore mentorability by providing conceptual depth towards a student's ability to commit, contribute, and engage in a mentoring partnership. As mentor and mentee connect on a developmental journey, mentees are truly in the driver's seat while mentors guide, direct, and support them along the ride. The goal of strengthening mentoring pairings exists but is nonetheless limited; assessing one's mentorability is meant to provide utility to the mentoring partnership and help transform student engagement and help with institutional transition.

With the bulk of the literature (Crisp et al., 2017) focusing on the roles (Colvin & Ashman 2010; Hall et al., 2008), functions (Bonin, 2013; Huss et al., 2002; Salinitri, 2005; Schreiner et al., 2011), and designs (Apprey et al., 2014; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Eby et al., 2006; Kostovich & Thurn, 2013) of a mentoring partnership and the output of measurable outcomes and benefits of the partnership, this study is advocating for the need to better inform and prepare mentees during the first stages of the partnership. This study introduced a mentorability conceptual model to discuss the minimum roles and responsibilities of both parties and emphasized the purpose of a mentoring partnership to strengthen and clarify the developmental relationship to novice mentees.

Future practice should examine how mentors and mentoring programs develop and build trust early to establish and cultivate the relationship at the beginning of the partnership. Challenges at the beginning of a partnership, especially in establishing trust, can diminish a partnership without allowing it to start. Mentees bring a wealth of experiences, including relational experiences to the partnership. These pre-conceived experiences may make participation in a mentoring relationship challenging and may lead to inactive and unengaged partnerships. By contrast, these pre-conceived experiences coupled with guidance can help mentees really thrive in a mentoring relationship and in the professional development of a mentee. Discussing mentee experiences while the mentee participates in a mentoring relationship contributes to addressing the need and argues for more preparation and ongoing reflection on the meaning of a mentoring partnership.

Developmental relationships are an important part of one's career and life journey. Without them we may be misguided or uniformed of potential opportunities or hidden potential. Assessing one's own mentorability can reshape how we view and participate in developmental

relationships and maximize the beneficial partnership. In this study I attempted to bring a voice to a mentee's experiences with the intent that we consider their lived experiences as we continue to advance mentoring work. After all, a mentee's development is why mentoring programs exist.

Appendices

Appendix A: Email Letter to Potential Participants

<< Date >>

Dear <Student Name>,

Hello, my name is Victoria Black and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration program in the College of Education, at the University of Texas at Austin. You are receiving this email because you have been identified as first-year student enrolled or have previously enrolled in a University Seminar section and a potential participant in my dissertation study. I am writing this email to inquire whether you would be interested in participating in two interviews I am conducting this year.

I am interested in learning more about your experiences as a first-year student participating in a mentoring partnership. To accomplish this, I plan to conduct two interviews (an individual and focus group) with 15-20 undergraduate students engaging in a mentoring partnership. If you feel this study is of interest to you, I ask that you review the selection criteria below:

- Be a first-year student in the PACE program at Texas State University and enrolled or previously enrolled in a University Seminar.
- Not have participated in a formal mentoring partnership prior to your first year.
- Participate in two interviews (individual and focus group) during your first-year.
- You must be willing to have the interviews audio-recorded (the audio-files will be destroyed when the interviews are transcribed).
- You agree that the data collected during the interviews can be used in reporting findings for the study and any additional publications and study.

If you agree to meet those criteria and are willing to participate in this study, please let me know as soon as possible. You can email me directly at: victoriablack@txstate.edu to let me know if you would like to participate. Please feel free to email or call me at 512- 294-6653 if you have any questions or would discuss the study further. I greatly appreciate your interest in the study and look forward to hearing from you soon.

This project #6859 was approved by the Texas State IRB on November 21, 2019 and UT-Austin IRB #2019-11-0115 on January 21st, 2020. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu)

Best,

Victoria G. Black, M.Ed.
Doctoral Student, Higher Education Administration Program
College of Education, The University of Texas at Austin

Appendix B: Pre-Interview Consent Form

Victoria Black, a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, is conducting a research study to explore and understand mentorability. You are being asked to complete this survey because you are a first-year student participating in a formal mentoring program.

Participation is voluntary. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes or less to complete. You must be at least 18 years old to take this survey.

This study involves no foreseeable serious risks. We ask that you try to answer all questions; however, if there are any terms that make you uncomfortable or that you would prefer to skip, please leave the answer blank. Your responses are confidential.

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide will contribute to enhancing and strengthening mentoring partnerships.

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Myself and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants. Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

If selected, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview in the fall 2019 semester and a focus group in spring 2020. The time commitment for the fall semester will be one hour individual interview. The time commitment for spring 2020 will be one hour focus group. Total time commitment for participation will be two hours.

If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact Victoria Black or her faculty advisor:

Victoria Black, Doctoral Student
University of Texas at Austin
victoriablack@utexas.edu

Dr. Paige Haber-Curran, Professor
Department of Counseling, Leadership, Adult Education and School Psychology
ph31@texasstate.edu

This project #6859 was approved by the Texas State IRB on November 21, 2019 and UT-Austin IRB #2019-11-0115 on January 22nd, 2020. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be

directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu)

If you would prefer not to participate, please do not fill out a survey.

If you consent to participate, please complete the survey.

Please note that you will not be identified by this information in our research. This is to help us track demographic data about the students who participate in our study.

What is a pseudonym that you would like to use? (Hint – a "fake name." You can choose something that starts with the same initial of your name, for instance.)

Pseudonym: _____

1. What is your declared major?

2. What is your hometown?

3. Are you Hispanic or Latino (a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race?
   - Yes
   - No

4. Please select the racial category or categories with which you most closely identify
   - American Indian or Alaska Native
   - Asian
   - Black or African American
   - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   - White
   - Other

Please indicate the highest level of your parents' or legal guardians' educational background

Father's educational level

- No High School
- Some High School
- High School Diploma or GED
- Some College
- Associates Degree
- Bachelors/4-Year Degree

- Graduate/Professional Degree

Mother's educational level

- No High School
- Some High School
- High School Diploma or GED
- Some College
- Associates Degree
- Bachelors/4-Year Degree
- Graduate/Professional Degree

5. What is your gender?
   - woman
   - man
   - non-binary
   - prefer not to answer

6. What is your immigration status?
   - citizen
   - resident
   - non-immigrant
   - undocumented

7. Have you previously participated in a formal mentoring relationship?

   - Yes
   - No

   If yes, were you mentored?

   - Yes
   - No

   Did you mentor someone else?

   - Yes
   - No

8. What was your high school GPA?

9. What was your class rank?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol Questions Individual Interview (Semi-Structured)

Participant Pseudonym:

Date/Time

RQ 1: How do student mentees describe their expectations at the beginning of the formal peer mentoring partnership?

1.) What is mentoring? How would you define what mentoring means to you?
2.) What does being in a peer to peer mentoring relationship mean to you?
    2a.) Describe a specific experience where you feel you were a mentee, what was that experience like?
3.) Do you think you have a role (contribution) in your mentoring relationship? If, so how would you define that role?
4.) What are some reasons you or a student like you might need a mentor?
5.) What are some reasons you or a student like you could benefit from a mentor?
6.) What are the benefits you think you will receive from being in a mentoring relationship?
    6a). How do you believe being in a mentoring relationship will impact your first year?

RQ 2: How do student mentees describe their lived experiences in the formal peer mentoring partnership?

7.) What type of information do you receive from your mentor?
8.) How will your Peer Mentor influence your first-year at Texas State?
9.) Describe your interactions with your mentor so far?
9.) What are some of the challenges you foresee in being in a mentoring relationship?
    9a). How do you think you can overcome the challenges?
10.) Is your mentor someone you can trust? Why?

RQ 3: How do student mentees describe the reciprocity they experience as part of the formal peer mentoring partnership?

11.) Think back to a recent engagement with your mentor. Have you taught your mentor something in your relationship? Will there be a time when you think you will teach your mentor something?
12.) Can you describe how you contribute to your mentoring relationship in some way?
13.) What do you think you can contribute to the mentoring relationship?
14.) What is a Hispanic Serving Institution?
    14a.) How will that influence your interaction with your mentor?

Appendix D: Informed Consent

Study Title: Mentorability – Understanding and Exploring First-Year Students' Perception of Engaging in a Mentoring Relationship at a Hispanic Serving Institution
Principal Investigator: Victoria Black Co- Principal Investigator: Dr. Paige Haber-Curan

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND
You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about how students understand the concept of mentorability and what it means to be mentored. The information gathered will be used to help further solicit and educate mentees on the concept of being mentorable. You are being asked to participate because you are participating in a formal mentoring partnership during your first-year.

PROCEDURES
We will invite you to meet together to discuss your perception of what it means to be mentored. The discussion topics include information about your past mentoring experience, your understanding of a mentoring relationship, and what you think you can bring to a mentoring relationship. A member of the research team will help guide the discussion. To protect the privacy of the individual and focus group members, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms and we ask that you not discuss what is discussed in the interviews with anyone else. The individual and focus group interview will last 45 minutes to 1 hour and will be audiotaped to make sure that it is recorded accurately. The audio-files will be destroyed when the interviews are transcribed.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
In the unlikely event that some of the survey or interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating and you are a Texas State University student, you may contact the Counseling Services att 512-245-2208. They are located on the 5th floor of the LBJSC.

BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES
There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide will be helpful in further developing mentoring relationships and training.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION
You will receive pizza and drinks for your participation in the study.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY
You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS
If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact PI-Investigator, Victoria Black, 512-245-4591.

This project #6859 was approved by the Texas State IRB on November 21, 2019 and UT-Austin IRB #2019-11-0115 on January 21st, 2020. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu)

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Your participation in this research project may be recorded using audio recording devices. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording:

Yes _____ No _____

_____ _____

Printed Name of Study Participant	**Signature** of Study Participant	Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date

Appendix E: Interview Protocol Questions Focus Group (Semi-Structured)

Participant Pseudonym:

Date/Time:

Thank you for returning to participate in the individual interview. The focus group will help further explain how you see your role in the relationship. I ask you to draw your answers from your recent experiences with your mentor and how you have engaged in the partnership.

RQ 1: How do student mentees describe their expectations at the beginning of the formal peer mentoring partnership?

1.) What is mentoring? How would you define what mentoring means to you?
2.) What does being in a peer to peer mentoring relationship mean to you?
    2a.) Describe a specific experience where you feel you were receptive to feedback, what was that experience like?
3.) What is your role (contribution) in your mentoring relationship? If, so how would you define that role?
4.) What are some reasons you or a student like you might need a mentor?
6.) What are the benefits you think you have received from being in a mentoring relationship?
    6a). How do you believe being in a mentoring relationship has impacted your first year?
7.) What would you tell a future mentee about how to engage in a relationship?

RQ 2: How do student mentees describe their lived experiences in the formal peer mentoring partnership?

8.) What type of information did you receive from your mentor?
9.) Describe how your Peer Mentor is influencing your first-year at Texas State?
10.) Describe any recent interactions with your mentor?
11.) What are some of the challenges you have encountered in being in a mentoring relationship?
    11a). How did you overcome those challenges?
12.) What do you think is the biggest mentee contributing factor that has made your mentoring relationship successful?

RQ 3: How do student mentees describe the reciprocity they experience as part of the formal peer mentoring partnership?

13.) Think back to a recent engagement with your mentor. Have you taught your mentor something in your relationship? Will there be a time when you think you will teach your mentor something?
14.) Can you describe how you contribute to your mentoring relationship in some way?
15.) Anything from a mentees perspective you think is important that I did not go over or that we should consider?

Card Sorting Structural Questions Activity (Spradley, 1979):
Here are a list of mentee characteristics or mentee dispositions-focused listed on postsecondary mentoring websites.
Characteristics/Mentee disposition-focused content (Taylor & Black, 2019):
Professional, communicative, open-minded, committed, responsible, initiative, active, realistic, understanding, available, willing.

- Can you please identify the three most important characteristics to you?
    - And the three that are least important to you?
- Why did you select each of these three?
- Did your mentor have any influence on your selection of characteristics?

Appendix F: Codebook

Phenomenology study "…that there is an essence or essences to shared experience. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced" (Patton, 2015) pg. 116).

For this study I will use deductive and inductive approach at coding. I had a few large overarching codes when I developed a conceptual map, determining the research questions and the interview protocol.

Since I am conducting a phenomenology study I am interested in their lived experiences and how they demonstrate their mentorability and make meaning of it. Specifically, the examples that help support the concept of mentorability and conceptualize it within a framework will be identified through the coding process.

Mentorability Codebook

Mentee Benefit – outcome of a mentor/mentee engagement
Motivation – The desire to contact their mentor or respond back to their mentor.
Commitment – The willingness to engage with a mentor both explicitly and implicitly
    -Explicit contact with their mentor
    -Implicit mentally aware of meeting/connecting with their mentor
Reciprocity – The understanding the mentee brings something to the experience
Open-minded - Open to feedback both in action and behavior
    -Action - Willingness to change; Receptive to feedback
    -Reverse open-mind – Resistance to change or use their mentors advice/suggestions
Initiative – Mentee initiated contact with mentor
Positive interaction – Examples of mentor/mentee contacts that are positive
Negative interaction – Examples of mentor/mentee contacts that are negative
Communicate – understanding that communicating is an important contribution to the partnership
Challenges – challenges or obstacles in engaging in a partnership
Mentorability – Other – Characteristics that demonstrate an important quality a mentee must possess in a mentoring partnership.
Mentor Description – Direct reference of mentor role/responsibility
Good Quotes – Excerpts of good quotes from the transcripts

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